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The Writer

THE OLDEST MAGAZINE
FOR LITERARY WORKERS
Founded in Boston, 1887

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Flash Fiction
Prize

· Judge: Tracey Slaughter
· Word Limit: 300
· Entry fee: $16 ($9 subsequent)
· Closes: 28 Feb '22

Prize Fund: $2,000
+ 10 best stories will be published in the
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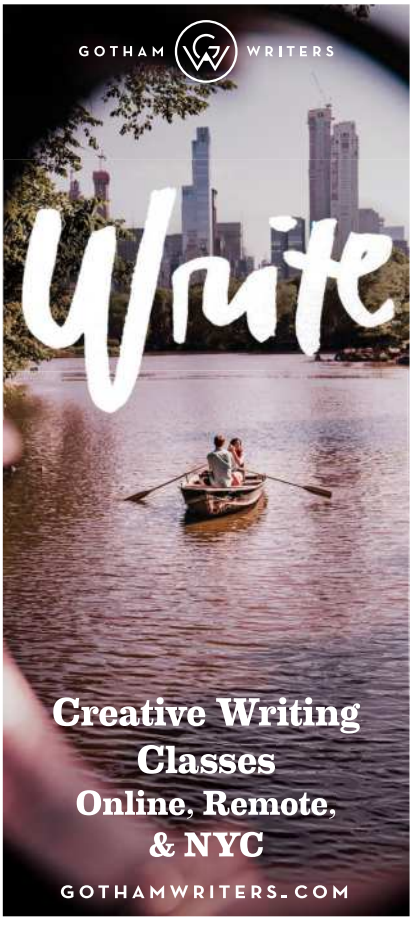
Details:
www.fishpublishing.com



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Please Recycle This Magazine

Prologue

"The writer is always tricking the reader into listening to their dream."

—JOAN DIDION

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WALNUT BIRD/SHUTTERSTOCK

The past in my present

OH, READER, WHAT AN EMBARRASSING confession I have for you this month.

I've tracked the books I've read for the past decade using a very official system called "a really long list in an untitled draft email," where I record the title, author, and the year it was read. I don't record my opinions of it or its genre or whether it was written by a debut author. So when I started completing a reading challenge in an app that *did* track all that, I was surprised to see my most-read genre of 2021 was historical fiction.

Huh.

If you had asked my opinion of historical fiction earlier in the year, I'd have responded, "Oh, I like it just fine!" Emphasis on "just fine" – I enjoyed it, truly, but it's not a favorite genre; I don't find myself particularly drawn to it.

Or so I thought.

I puzzled over the list, wondering what I'd missed. I noticed I would've mistakenly classified some of the titles as just "fiction," finding it hard to believe that books set in the '70s, '80s, or '90s are indeed now "historical." But that didn't explain why later in the year, when offered a writing prompt that listed several time periods to choose from – including the present and future – I eagerly snatched the oldest period on the list and took off running on the page like I was a bona fide resident of the era.

Huh again.

I looked at my Netflix queue: Certainly no shortage of costume dramas and period pieces. Hell, my favorite podcast is about Old Hollywood.

What a fool I'd been, I realized. I *loved* history, both on and off the page. Why had it taken me this many years on the planet to realize it?

Because, I eventually realized, I was still working with the definition of history as it had been taught to me in grade school, when it was a subject that I liked, again, *just fine*. I spent a great many hours memorizing names and dates and the political squabbles of rich white landowners, and I did well enough at the time, but if you gave me the choice of repeating those classes or cleaning every centimeter of my house with a doll-size toothbrush, I'd probably roll up my sleeves and start scrubbing.

But I've always loved elements of the past, I realize now. I just didn't see how my favorite subjects fit into "history." And I needed something external, something outside myself and driven in data, to show me just how much the past was already a part of my life.

Isn't that always the way? We try to be as vigilant as we can about our own blocks and blind spots, but we'll never be able to see even the most glaring and obvious ones on our own without work and a little external guidance.

I'm trying something new this year, I've decided. I'm circling back on all my other just-fine genres, both as a reader and a writer. I'm trying hard to shake off any notion of what I *think* I know about a genre, or what they've meant to me in the past, and approaching them like a wide-eyed, first-time student. I can't wait to try writing in them. I can't wait to see how they surprise me – and, most of all, how I surprise myself.

I'd love for you to join me if you're in a rut or need some inspiration this year. Tell us how your writing-outside-your-genre adventures go at tweditorial@madavor.com or on social media. We'd be thrilled to share your adventures, successes, and revelations in a future issue.

Keep writing,

Nicki Porter
SENIOR EDITOR

IN MEMORIAM:
Jennifer Hanrahan, 1992-2021

We'd like to dedicate this issue of *The Writer* to Jennifer "Jenshine" Hanrahan, who spent years working in support of this magazine with the brightest of smiles on her face. She will be dearly missed by our staff.

Best & brightest

A look at some of the hottest books hitting store shelves in early 2022.

GOODSTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

YA

***I Must Betray You* by Ruta Sepetys (Feb. 1)**
Award-winning author Ruta Sepetys' latest historical YA novel follows a 17-year-old aspiring writer in Romania who is blackmailed by the secret police to become an informant. "Sepetys brilliantly blends a staggering amount of research with heart, craft, and insight in a way very few writers can," praises *Kirkus Reviews* in a starred review of this "compulsively readable and brilliant" book.

***Ophelia After All* by Racquel Marie (Feb. 8)**
This debut novel stars boy-crazy Cuban American teenager Ophelia Rojas, who discovers "the course of love – and sexuality – never did run smooth" when she develops a crush on her classmate, Talia Sanchez. "This touching debut offers an emotional ride that readers will be happy to embark upon," praises *Booklist.*

***Bitter* by Akwaeke Emezi (Feb. 15)**
Fans of Akwaeke Emezi are eagerly awaiting *Bitter*, a companion novel to Emezi's debut YA novel and National Book Award finalist *Pet*. In a starred review, *Kirkus Reviews* calls it "a compact, urgent, and divine novel."

***Gallant* by V.E. Schwab (March 1)**
Bestselling author V.E. Schwab returns with a novel about a young woman who, having grown up at

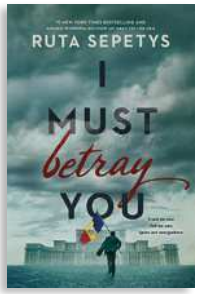
Merilance School for Independent Girls, is thrilled to be invited to live at her uncle's manor, Gallant – only to discover the house has a dark side she never anticipated. In a starred review, *Kirkus Reviews* promises the book "will hook readers with its gripping worldbuilding, well-rounded characters, and fantastic horror."

***Lakelore* by Anna-Marie McLemore (March 8)**
Bastián and Lore, two trans nonbinary and neurodivergent Mexican American teens, helm this fantastical novel by award-winning author Anna-Marie McLemore. *Kirkus Reviews* calls it "a beauty both bright and deep" in a starred review.

FICTION

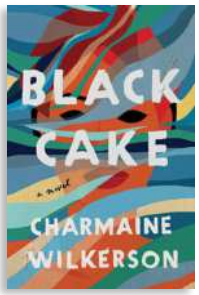
***Black Cake* by Charmaine Wilkerson (Feb. 1)**
Two estranged siblings must reckon with their mother's past after her death in this debut novel, set to soon be a Hulu series produced by Oprah Winfrey. "Readers will adore this highly accomplished effort from a talented new writer," writes *Publishers Weekly* in a starred review.

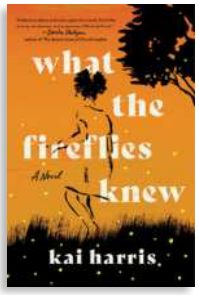
***What the Fireflies Knew* by Kai Harris (Feb. 1)**
In this debut novel, Kenyatta Bernice (KB) must navigate her new life alongside her sister after her father dies of an overdose, and the girls are sent to live with their estranged grandfather in Lansing, Michigan, in a story that *Kirkus Reviews* calls "quietly powerful."

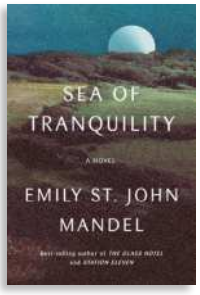


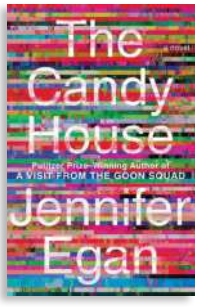
***The Paris Apartment* by Lucy Foley (Feb. 22)**
Fresh off the success of her bestselling novel *The Guest List,* Lucy Foley returns with a locked-room mystery about a woman who arrives in the titular apartment, only to find her brother, its owner, has gone inexplicably missing. "*The Paris Apartment* is a charged, charming thriller that'll have us all eyeing the neighbors a bit skeptically, no matter where it is we live," praises *Town & Country*.

***Sea of Tranquility* by Emily St. John Mandel (April 5)**
Just months after the television adaptation of *Station Eleven* airs, Emily St. John Mandel's newest novel hits bookstore shelves. The time-traveling book braids together stories from the past and an imagined future in three different timelines, from 1912 to 2203 to 2401. "If there was ever a year to write sci-fi autofiction with moon colonies and time travel, it was 2020," Mandel told *Esquire* in a recent interview. "We were all kind of deranged in 2020. The fiction coming out of that year will probably be a little deranged, too."









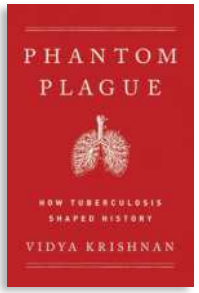
***The Candy House* by Jennifer Egan (April 5)**
Jennifer Egan's latest, a so-called "sibling novel" to the bestselling *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, is already being heralded as a "story that one-ups its Pulitzer-winning predecessor" by *Publishers Weekly*.

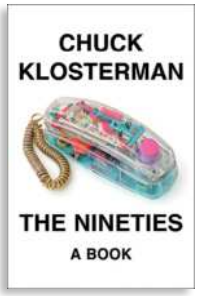
NONFICTION

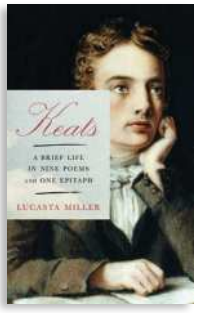
***The Phantom Plague: How Tuberculosis Shaped History* by Vidya Krishnan (Feb. 1)**
Journalist Vidya Krishnan's debut book is being billed as "the definitive social history of tuberculosis," tracing the global disease from its very beginnings to its reemergence in the modern world. *Kirkus*, in a starred review, calls it "a timely, significant analysis of the dire consequences of public health failures."

***The Nineties* by Chuck Klosterman (Feb. 8)**
"No stories were viral. No celebrity was trending," bestselling author Chuck Klosterman writes of the 1990s in this deep dive on the decade. "The world was still big. The country was still vast. You could just be a little person, with your own little life and your own little thoughts. You didn't have to have an opinion, and nobody cared if you did or did not." In a starred review, *Booklist* calls Klosterman's newest book "wonderfully researched, compellingly written, and often very funny...a superb reassessment of an underappreciated decade from a stupendously gifted essayist."

GOODSTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK







***The Very Last Interview* by David Shields (March 29)**
David Shields, bestselling author of 20 books, has been interviewed quite a bit over the years for a variety of outlets (this magazine included.) In *The Very Last Interview,* billed as "a sequel of sorts" to his acclaimed *Reality Hunger*, he collects all of the questions he's been asked by journalists – and omits all of his own answers. The result is a book *Kirkus Reviews* calls "totally deadpan and irresistibly hilarious" in a starred review.

***Keats: A Brief Life in Nine Poems and One Epitaph* by Lucasta Miller (March 29)**
Biographer Lucasta Miller examines the short life of John Keats, who died at age 25, through nine of his best-known poems, aiming to discover "how they came to be and what in Keats's life led to their creation."

***Finding Me* by Viola Davis (April 26)**
Academy Award, Emmy, and Tony-winning actress Viola Davis turns to memoir for the first time with this much-buzzed debut, billed as "deeply personal, brutally honest, and riveting" and due out at the end of April.

Write-minded

A new guest joins co-hosts Brooke Warner and Grant Faulkner each episode for inspiration, insight, and advice on this weekly podcast.

By Melissa Hart

FOUR YEARS AGO, SHE WRITES PRESS publisher Brooke Warner sat down in a Berkeley, California, restaurant with Grant Faulkner, executive director of National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), and made plans to launch a podcast that would encourage writers at any stage of their career. "We wanted our themes to range from learning to believe in your story and get it down on the page to how to publish," Faulkner explains. "We view writing and publishing as different stages of a creative journey."

He'd been impressed with Warner's *Green-Light Your Book: How Writers Can Succeed in the New Era of Publishing,* with its message of empowerment, so when she suggested that he co-host, he immediately agreed. "That's what we're all about at NaNoWriMo as well – empowering people and helping them put their voice and their story in the world," he says.

Their weekly podcast, *Write-minded,* offers insight into the joys and challenges of literary life. Sometimes, the hosts mention upcoming literary workshops and other relevant events, both remote and in-person. Sometimes, they spend a few minutes bantering about topics like writing and parenting or publishing trends or the importance of curiosity in a writer's life. Each episode includes an interview with an author or publishing industry professional.

"We pick a guest, and then we ask ourselves what theme the episode will explore based on that writer," Warner explains. Past themes include "Allowing Anger to Fuel Your Writing" (November 1, 2021), "Using Storytelling to Inform and Educate" (September 20, 2021), and "The Joy and Angst of a Newly Released Book" (July 26, 2021). "We invite writers from diverse backgrounds, with all kinds of experiences," Warner says.

Subscribe to *Write-minded* wherever you get your podcasts or listen at podcast.shewrites.com and sign up for email alerts about new episodes. Interested in being a guest on *Write-minded*? Email Brooke Warner and Grant Faulkner at hello@writemindedpodcast.com.

What you'll learn

Charlie Jane Anders is the author of *Never Say You Can't Survive: How to Get Through Hard Times by Making Up Stories*. In her guest episode of *Write-minded* titled "The Difficult Balance of Writing and Self-Care" (October 11, 2021), she talks about how to remain vulnerable in the middle of personal and/or global crisis and how to move through feelings of depletion to continue down the creative path.

"She really dug into this topic because of the pandemic," Faulkner explains. "She spoke about why writing is important when the world feels really against you in a deep and

terrifying way, and it was particularly relevant to people who feel shut down by trauma."

New York Times bestselling author Kwame Mbalia speaks about "Why Retelling Stories is Always an Act of Creation" (November 15, 2021), giving listeners insights into how to live with one's characters as well as who inspires him as an author. The author of the middle-grade novel *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky*, Mbalia talks about participating in National Novel Writing Month four years in a row.

"My process is leashed chaos simply because I have children, and children demand attention," he says and goes on to describe how he writes 50 to 200 words several times throughout the day between parenting obligations. "When the kids are finally in bed...I sit and look at what I've done, and I have anywhere between seven hundred and a thousand words, and I'm like 'Oh my gosh, I've written!'" he exclaims.

In one episode of *Write-minded*, novelist and television writer Shanthi Sekaran talks about "Migration as an Essential Shared Story" (November 29, 2021) and asks writers to think about their own migration experiences – as immigrants or as members of a family that has occupied the same space over generations. Another episode features Deesha Philyaw, author of *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies* (February 20, 2021), who talks about how she's used the #Bookstagram hashtag on Instagram to let readers know about her book and how to be intentional about writing in order to focus on the projects that most move you.

"My collection came about because I got stuck on a novel, and so I pivoted [to short stories]," she says. To writers who believe they don't have enough time to write, she suggests looking at how they're spending their free half-hours. "We have time; it's just how we choose to use it," she explains.

"We want to help people tell their story. We're not selling an empty dream."

Join the mission

Warner wants each episode of *Write-minded* to offer a moment of revelation for listeners. "I always come back to our tagline, which is 'inspiration for authors,'" she says.

The mission of the podcast ties in with Faulkner's and Warner's personal missions, as well as the missions of the organizations they represent. "We want to help people tell their story," Faulkner explains. "We're not selling an empty dream. We're not trying to tell people that they'll write a bestseller and earn a lot of money and be famous. It's more about identifying the story that matters to them and being bold enough to tell it. That is the real gift."

Melissa Hart is the author, most recently, of Better with Books: 500 Diverse Books to Ignite Empathy and Encourage Self-Acceptance in Tweens and Teens. *Twitter/Instagram: @WildMelissaHart.*

Calls for submissions

***Feels Blind Literary:* Writers who are nonbinary or identify as women**

Send short fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, plays, and art to *Feels Blind Literary* for consideration for its seventh issue. Only submissions by writers and artists who are nonbinary or identify as women will be accepted for publication. On Mondays, it is free to submit; on other days of the week, the submission fee is $3, a portion of which will be donated to the Richmond Community Bail Fund. Submit by March 6.

feelsblindliterary.com/donate

***About Place Journal:* Submissions for 'Navigations: A Place for Peace' issue**

About Place Journal editors are seeking prose, poetry, hybrid genre, photography, artwork, sound-art, and video for their "Navigations: A Place for Peace" issue. Submit by March 10 for consideration in the issue.

aboutplacejournal.org/submissions

***Mistake House Magazine:* Undergraduate and graduate writers**

This journal publishes fiction and poetry by students currently enrolled in a graduate or undergraduate program. Submissions of photography and works in translation are also welcome. Three $100 Editor's Prizes, one for fiction, one for poetry, and one for photography, will also be awarded. Submit by March 15 for consideration in issue 8.

mistakehouse.org/submit

Mystery Magazine

Love mysteries? Send your classic & contemporary whodunits for consideration in this 6-year-old journal.

By Melissa Hart

A MAILMAN TASKED WITH DELIVERing a potentially life-saving secret formula to a Des Moines epidemiologist finds his life threatened by people determined to steal the information for themselves.

A woman befriends the daughter of a homicide victim after a 1945 pogrom in Krakow's Market Square and swears to do whatever it takes to find the mother's murderer.

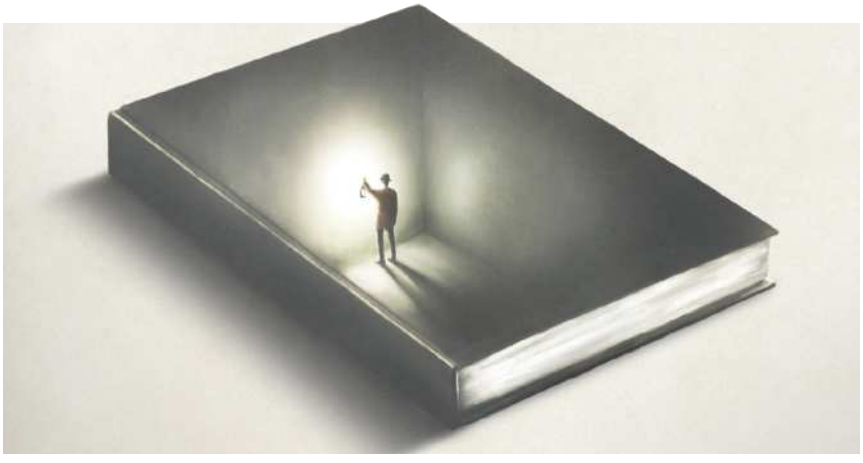
A woman with a chronic medical condition begins to question reality and her sanity when specially purchased therapeutic foods in her refrigerator begin to vanish.

These are three of the plotlines from *Mystery Magazine*, a 6-year-old print and digital publication based in Canada. Editor Kerry Carter looks for stories that evoke classic mysteries by Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, as well as the pulp fiction stylings of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. Got a contemporary tale that's more Tana French or Patricia Cornwell? Carter wants to see those as well.

Tone, editorial content

"Judging by the reviews and feedback we've received, our readers seem to love stories with humor," Carter says. To meet this demand, staff recently released their first hardcover anthology, called *Die Laughing: An Anthology of Humorous Mysteries*, which Carter notes has sold exceptionally well. "We received so many great stories for that collection that we've got quite a few left over, so readers will be noticing more humorous mysteries in our regular magazine issues," she says.

One of these stories is T.T. Trestle's "Breastman," about a hard-edged male debt collector who wakes up with well-endowed breasts. "He comes to realize that having them offers special perks," Carter explains. In December 2021, she published another humorous piece, "Cajun State" by O'Neil De Noux. Set at Cajun State University, De Noux's story follows retired New Orleans police detective Hunter Bourget, now a university police officer, who's charged with finding both the large Christmas tree that's been



FRAN_KIE/SHUTTERSTOCK

"At the cutting edge of crime fiction, Mystery Magazine *presents original short stories by the world's best-known and emerging mystery writers."*

Reading period:
Year-round.

Genres:
Cozies, police procedurals, noir, whodunit, supernatural, hardboiled, humor, and historical mysteries.

Length:
1,000-7,500 words.

Submission format:
Submit via form on website.

Payment:
Two cents/word USD.

Contact:
Editor-in-Chief Kerry Carter, editor@MysteryMagazine.ca, mysteryweekly.com

stolen from campus…and the thief. Carter appreciates the author's witty writing, along with the absurd premise of a worldwide hunt for a stolen Christmas tree.

Contributors

The December issue of *Mystery Magazine* includes Robert Jeschonek's "The X in Xmas," about Detective Charlie Collins, who joins forces with a female detective connected with the mob in order to solve the murder of a Mafia boss during the December holiday season. Kerry notes on the magazine's website that in the story, "the twisted holiday traditions of local wise guys lead them down a dark road decorated with death."

She's excited to publish Frank Oreto's "The Maintainer of Diaries" in an upcoming issue. It's the story of a retired detective trying to solve the only bona-fide mystery he's come across during his policing career. "Customers of a certain used bookstore have a habit of disappearing," she says of Oreto's piece. "Using stark but evocative writing, the author doesn't waste any time pulling you into his clever story, and the story also has a surprising ending."

Carter enjoys mysteries with unique settings, pointing to Josh Taylor's "The Path of Least Resistance," a whodunit set on a mining ship in space, as the type of story she likes to publish. John M. Floyd's "Lily's Story" (publication date TBA) takes place in 19th-century California, while Gretchen Altabef's "In the Land of the Living" (October 2021) is set in the Swiss Alps.

Advice for potential contributors

Editors are open to almost any type of story as long as it has a mystery element. "We tend to turn down stories that give themselves an expiration date or reference politics, terminal diseases, or the COVID pandemic," Carter explains. She also rejects pieces involving excessive violence and/or animal cruelty. Everything else is fair game.

She suggests that potential contributors submit a story for one of the magazine's special annual issues, such as the Sherlock Holmes issue in October or the Christmas issue in December. "And we're always on the lookout for more cross-genre stories," she says. "Although we brand ourselves as a mainstream cross-genre mystery magazine, we really don't receive enough stories with sci-fi, horror, or fantasy elements."

Hoping to land a cover story? Carter explains that to snag this coveted spot, you need to submit a story of at least 4,000 words and include evocative visual scenes to inspire cover artist Robin Grenville Evans.

C. Matthew Smith's story "Hundred Year Flood" in the August 2021 issue is an excellent example. From the magazine's website: "Massive flooding disinters bodies from a small town's cemeteries. In the wake of this horrific event, someone is leaving a trail of new bodies, and the local sheriff must race to figure out who – or what – is to blame." Evans' cover illustration depicts coffins floating down a flooded urban street in the midst of a punishing rainfall.

Potential contributors wanting to study the stories in *Mystery Magazine*'s back issues have plenty of options. Subscribe in Kindle Newsstand or download issues from Kobo, Barnes & Noble, and other online retailers. "Our own story reader mobile app lets you read any of the stories from our current and back issues using tokens," Carter explains. "These can be purchased or earned through social actions such as commenting on stories or promoting our issues."

Melissa Hart is the author, most recently, of Better with Books: 500 Diverse Books to Ignite Empathy and Encourage Self-Acceptance in Tweens and Teens *(Sasquatch, 2019). Instagram: @writermelissahart.*

2022 Bougainvillea Poetry Prize: Poetry collections
The Bougainvillea Poetry Prize, sponsored by Flower-Song Press, seeks poetry that "grapples with issues concerning the poor, workers, the underclass, financial insecurity, working conditions, inequity, precarity, and related concerns" for its annual prize. The winning collection will be published and awarded $750. Working-class, BIPOC, and LGBTQ poets are especially encouraged to submit. Submit by March 31.
flowersongpress.com/the-2022-bougainvillea-poetry-prize

Bag of Bones Press: Modern horror
Submit horror or dark speculative fiction up to 2,022 words for consideration in Bag of Bones Press' Annus Horribilis anthology. The catch? Every story must be set in 2022. ("We don't want one hundred stories all about coronavirus though, so think outside of the box," the editors remind submitters.) Twenty percent of anthology sales will be donated to children's charities in the U.K. Submit by March 31.
bagofbonespress.com/submission-calls

Geminga 2022: Tiny prose, poetry, or art
Sunspot Lit will award $250 and publication to the winner of this contest, which aims "to honor the power of the small." Send prose under 100 words, poetry under 140 characters, or art no larger than 25 inches for consideration. Submit by March 31.
sunspotlit.com/contests

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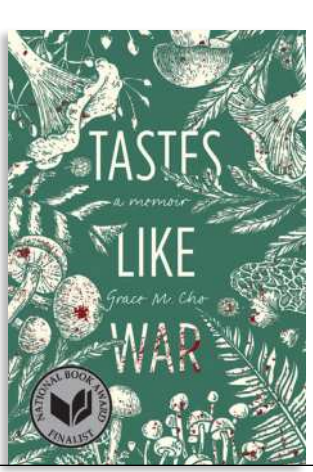
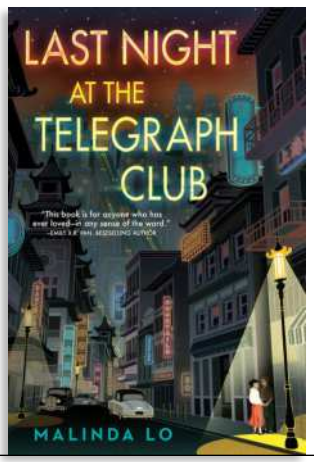
Broadening the **Bookshelves**

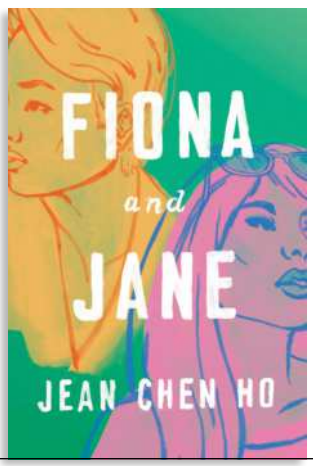
EAST ASIAN LITERATURE

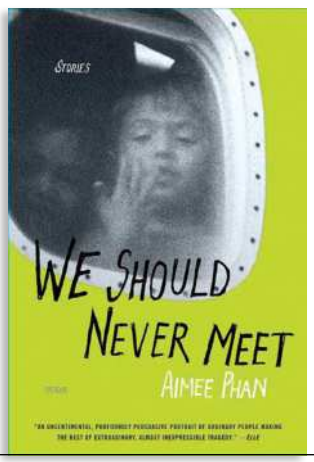
This month, we're shining a spotlight on East Asian literature.

By Yi Shun Lai









SPICYTRUFFEL/SHUTTERSTOCK

Getting to know East Asian Literature

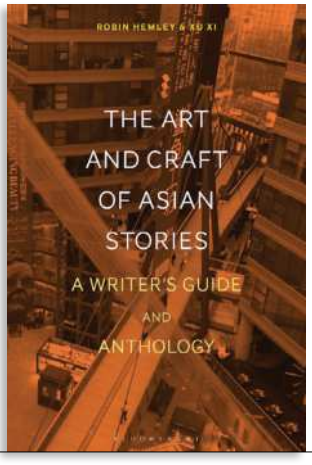
Sometimes, you talk to a person, and they give you a bunch of hope for the future while simultaneously making it very clear that you still have a lot left to learn.

I'm talking to Xu Xi, Jenks Chair of Contemporary Letters at College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, author of 14 books and editor of four anthologies of Hong Kong writing in English. Her latest project is *The Art and Craft of Asian Stories*, an anthology comprising a selection of works by Asian authors with commentary from Xi and travel writer Robin Hemley (Bloomsbury Academic, October 2021). For starters, the anthology was a hard project for me to wrap my brain around – it isn't, Xi and Hemley write in the introduction, "meant to silo off Asian writing for Asian writers." In fact, it's meant to do almost the exact opposite – it's meant to "widen the field of models for students from any background in any country."

I take some time over this sentence in the introduction because I have become used to judging a book by its cover – and, worse, a short story or a novel or any text, really, by the perceived ethnicity of the person who wrote it. Frankly speaking, I should know better: When I queried my debut novel in 2014, I fretted, and rightfully so, that potential readers would see my name on its cover and expect a certain kind of narrative, one that takes place in Taiwan, where I'm from, and is peppered with all sorts of exotic foods and chopsticks, and in which, when the characters speak, it's in broken English, charmingly offset with italics when they mispronounce words.

In some ways, I was right to worry – my book, a contemporary women's novel, is shelved in "Asian American studies" in some places, and I did get told by a major agent that I should employ more broken English and more food descriptions.

It is all very much tied up in what folks believe is marketable – and what the gatekeepers believe the American public wants to see; what they believe is an "authentic" story from an ethnic voice. But even though that was seven years ago, the question of who "gets" to write or tell which stories is still on everyone's lips. In my case, it's a constant battle between whether I write my American existence or the Asian culture and ethnicity that rules my parents' house – and, if I'm being totally transparent, often guides my first impressions. Xi has another, and to my ears, *healthier* way of looking at the quandary. She says, "I think that saying who is the authentic writer is the worst question you can ask. It's like it's almost irrelevant because authenticity has nothing to do with the imagination or creativity or art. You know, art is about 'how do you see the world?' And 'what is humanity about?' Whatever vantage point you take is authentic."



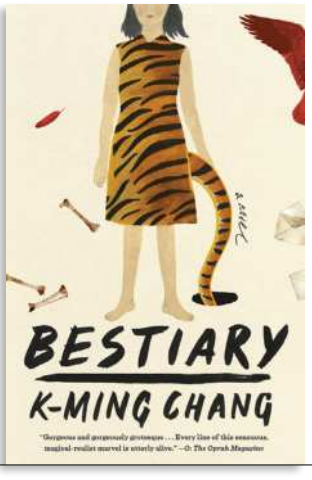
This is deeply refreshing to hear. But Xi has more knowledge to impart. I tell her about the students in the Master of Fine Arts programs I teach in, who say that they want to be seen as writers who just *happen* to be Asian or *happen* to be Mexican or Black or female and who also are good writers who tell good stories.

Xi tells me that she believes that the way forward from that is to keep encouraging these writers to write their actual lives. "I mean," she says, "the question is, how does a writer that happens to be East Asian *live*? Does she live an East Asian life or American life? Or is it a life where they never speak their language, the East Asian language, [a life] where they never eat the food? [Today's writer is] drinking bubble tea, and they're eating kimchi, and then they're also eating pizza – I mean, this is normal now, right? I think that somehow their writing is going to reflect that. It's 'how do they live?'...How do they experience the world? What do they see? How do

they move? What concerns them? What catches their eye? What are you hearing? What are you listening to?"

In many ways, this is a deeply ironic position for me to ponder writing from: I, who also wanted to be seen as a writer who just *happens* to be East Asian, never really had East Asian friends, nor did I seek them out. And although my mother cooked the way her mother cooked in the countryside of Taiwan, once she discovered the less elaborate American meals of steak, salad, and potato, we moved quickly to that. And, growing up in the Inland Empire of Southern California, our food choices for dining out, more often than not, were pizza, submarine sandwiches, or Chinese takeout, which bore little to no resemblance to the food of my childhood. So although my published name is ethnic and my family practices my home language and traditions, I would fall into the category of writers whose lived experience is more American than Asian.

And thus comes the second learning point Xi has to impart to me, the marked difference between Asian literature and literature from the Asian diaspora. She notes that the globalism of our current time is encouraging travel to the point where writers can move back and forth between East Asia and the United States. "They've mastered both languages, and it's not like they're separated from their [home] cultures. So someone like Gish Jen, for example, is really a very American writer, right? And she doesn't pretend to be otherwise; at the same time, she's drawing on all that Chinese family and cultural history. The young people, younger writers, who are coming from China or Shanghai or Hong Kong with Taiwan or whatever, can look to the West and go there, and be just as comfortable there as they are here."



At this point in the conversation, something clicks for me. *Me*, I say to myself. Xi is talking about *me.* I, too, straddle these two different worlds. I may not be teaching classes in Taiwanese or even in Taiwan anytime soon, but I can see a future in which that happens. I don't know if any of the books I write will appeal equally to East Asian audiences and majority-white audiences, but it shouldn't matter because there is a whole demographic of folks who are writing stories that not only occupy the space between Americana and Black, Latinx, East Asian, Muslim heritages but that move fluidly and joyfully between and among them.

Literature changes to reflect the demographic that writes it, not the demographic that reads it: While there still may be echoes of the type of prejudice that influences my own reading, younger writers, Xi notes (she cites K-Ming Chang's *Bestiary*, which spans three generations and addresses queer love), are writing very much against the stereotype *while* they're drawing on the legends and lore of East Asia. There will be no dragon ladies or trauma narratives in which the single Asian girl in a majority white school gets bullied. "A lot of writers now are cutting through stereotype, writing narratives in which, yeah, OK, a girl gets bullied, but maybe she's also a bully," she says.

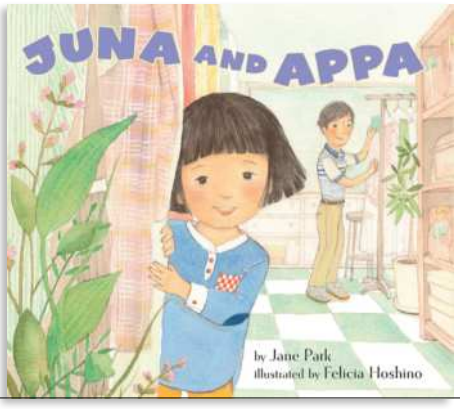
"I think that saying who is the authentic writer is the worst question you can ask. It's like it's almost irrelevant because authenticity has nothing to do with the imagination or creativity or art."

Talking with Xi has, like all the best conversations, challenged and exposed my own prejudices and allowed me a larger lens with which to view an entire demographic's literature. And if it feels a little funny that the demographic she's pulled back the curtain on happens to be my own, well, so be it. No one ever said that growth was painless.

Yi Shun Lai is the author of Pin Ups, *a memoir. She teaches in the MFA programs at Bay Path and Southern New Hampshire universities and is a founding editor of* Undomesticated Magazine. *Visit at undomesticatedmag.com.*

Talk to the Practitioner:
Jane Park

I met Jane Park during a children's literature happy hour over Zoom. In one of the breakout rooms, she mentioned that her latest picture book, *Juna and Appa*, was coming out in 2022. It'll be her second publication with Lee & Low publishers, and her first book with them, *Juna's Jar*, was published as a result of her winning Lee & Low's New Voices Award, which is given to a children's picture book manuscript by a writer of color or Indigenous/Native writer. Park's work is joyful and sensitive, depicting with sharpness and nuance a life lived multiculturally, so I sat down with her over Zoom to talk about everything from endings to political activism.



The Writer: When we first met, we had a chat about endings. We talked about how the conventional wisdom skews more toward happy endings in children's literature. Can we talk a little about how you view endings and how that works its way into your books?

Jane Park: I think to *only* have happy endings in picture books really does a disservice to our children. We're socializing them to think that there's always an answer, all things can be resolved in 32 pages if you just try hard enough. If you're just special enough. We all know that we can try and be as good as we can be, and things still don't work out. And, in fact, many old fairytales and folktales have pretty grim endings. When did we decide *all* children's stories need a "happily ever after?" Sometimes we might need the fantasy and have things end neatly. But sometimes we just need some comfort from knowing that others go through things like this, too, and that we're not alone.

When I first started watching Korean films (once they became more available in the U.S.), I used to feel frustrated by the endings. I felt like they'd just abruptly end. But I later realized that I was looking at them through a very American lens. An aspect that I really appreciate about Korean work is that it often defies conventional genre boundaries. You think you're watching a drama, and in the middle of it, you get over-the-top, gross-out comedy. I mean, what is the phenomenon that is *Squid Game*? Or the novel *Kim Ji-young: Born 1982,* [which] has nonfiction elements like footnotes. I love that.

Life is comedy and horror and drama all together, and they throw it all at you. Why are we so interested in creating boundaries and limitations and formulas for art? Isn't art precisely about playing with or even defying conventions?

The ending for *Juna and Appa* was definitely an issue that came up. [*Ed. note:* Juna and Appa *centers around Juna's father misplacing a client's jacket.]* I got a lot of initial feedback that the missing jacket must be found. But that's not what this book is about, and, in fact, [a happy ending] would negate what it's about. I felt unwavering about the ending. Luckily my editor, Jessica Echeverria, very much related to this story and never once said she thought that the jacket needed to be found. It doesn't need to have a pat, neat ending in order to feel satisfying.

TW: *Juna and Appa* draws some inspiration from your own childhood. What's it like to work with your memories in this fashion? And, at some point, do the book and its characters take on a life of their own? What's that like?

JP: There's a lot I drew upon from spending so much time at my parents' [dry cleaning] shop when I was young, but ultimately it is fiction. So it starts with fragments of memories of being at the shop. It's strange that I can't really remember any specific incidents or conversations that happened, but I remember things like the warmth of the steam from the presser, the texture of grimy shirt collars, the slippery feel of rows of plastic-covered clothes. Then, I thought about the character of Juna. What would she do at the shop and with those shop supplies? And how would she process her feelings from witnessing a difficult moment? I would have squashed and repressed them, but how would Juna work through them? Her character drives the story forward.

[The incident with the character who loses his coat,] Mr. Parker, never happened, and it happened a thousand times. To my dad, to my mom, to me when I worked the counter. I often felt like many people saw me as "less than" because I was behind the counter, and they were in front. I hope that the kids who are growing up in their family shops will feel seen. And, more broadly, the kids who have seen their parents, their heroes, treated as "less than," too. I want these stories to be authentically and compassionately told so that kids might feel that they are not alone.

Felicia [Hoshino, *Juna and Appa's* illustrator] also brings in her own memories of her dad and the dads she knows. I think many people believe that the picture book author tells the illustrator what to draw, but this is not the usual process at all. When an illustrator comes on board, they've read the manuscript and have their own vision for how to bring the story to life visually. I was unable to even imagine how she would illustrate Juna running through the rows of clothes into the forest. I saw it as a moving image, but how to capture that in a spread? What she did is so magical.

TW: Last year, you participated in a rally for AAPI Youth Rising, an organization largely composed of middle school students calling attention to rising xenophobia against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) in the United States. You wrote a poem for the young women in the audience. What role do you think picture book writers can play in our current zeitgeist in terms of inspiration, politics, and driving public thought?

JP: If you think about what kind of books could really drive social change, I think that picture books would top the list. I've seen very few adults actually radically change from reading a book. You pick and choose what you want to read, and they're usually books that appeal to you, not challenge you.

But picture books are formative. They're for the time when adults spend the most time reading books with kids and actually have conversations about them. They reach both the adult and child and prompt dialogue. Picture books are powerful because they are visual representations of our existence. They shape the way kids view the world and their sense of themselves and their place in it. So what happens when they're invisible in them? Or misrepresented? In Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen's analysis of diversity in picture books, it revealed that not only do picture books feature majority white protagonists but that there are even more books about animals than of all kids of color combined.

There are studies that show that kids who were read picture books featuring cross-racial friendships became more inclined to reach out to and play with kids of different races. That's a mind-boggling finding! It provides a concrete, actionable step that could be implemented tomorrow! If we are all working toward a more equitable and just future for all kids, shouldn't this incredible finding impact the decisions about the kind of picture books that are published?

We need books that feature a diversity of kids with different lived experiences who have stories to tell. All these diverse experiences need to be normalized, not exoticized or "othered" in picture books. We know they are deeply impactful! We talk about our favorite kids' books, remember and cherish them into our adulthood. Isn't it far more effective to represent a more honest truth when kids are forming their perceptions

of the world rather than try to undo the skewed messaging as adults?

TW: What role would YOU like to play, if any?

JP: I would love for my work to speak for itself, but at this moment in time, I don't feel like there's a choice to be more anonymous. I'm usually resistant to put myself out there or to join groups or identify myself by profession. But we need to take up space and tell our stories! If not, other people tell our stories for us and decide who we are. We are not just about holidays and food.

We don't all have to be public speakers to make a difference. I want to encourage kids to do what they do to express themselves – speak out, write, draw, code, create, sing, dance. We are quiet, and we're loud – we're not a monolith, and I wish we would stop instilling this "self-help" mentality that kids have to be fixed, to be better, to be different. They are enough just as they are.

AAPIs aren't being attacked and scapegoated because we're so quiet and complacent. AAPIs are being attacked because of racism. This is essentially what I wanted to share with the AAPI Youth Rising girls. I had expected maybe 100 people to show up and felt OK about reading my poem, a love letter to my daughter and these girls. The girls somehow managed to get 1,200 people to show up! I was pretty shocked, but at that point, there was no way out of it. I had to take these girls' lead and be brave.

I hope to continue to have the opportunity to write stories about kids of color just being kids, but with cultural specificity and universal themes. Like the scholar Rudine Sims Bishop wrote, all kids need windows and mirror books – ones to look into people's lives and ones that reflect your experiences back to you and affirm who you are. Such a genius way to put it! When I was a kid, I devoured books, but they were definitely all window books. I remember literally crying and accusing my dad of not loving me because what I learned from books is that you show love by saying "I love you" and with hugs and kisses. My dad never hugged or kissed me or ever once said that he loved me. But he worked 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. six days a week to make sure we were sheltered and clothed and fed. He always cut the fruit after dinner for us. And I love chestnuts to this day because they remind me of him scoring and roasting piles of them for us. Like the Darwin frog says in *Juna and Appa*, parents show love in lots of different ways. I don't want kids to have to wait until they're adults and discover Subtle Asian Traits to realize that their parents, of course, had deep, deep love for them. *[Ed. note: "Subtle Asian Traits" is an online group that connects "Asian individuals globally to create a community that celebrates the similarities and differences within the subtle traits of Asian culture and sub-cultures."]*

TW: Can you tell us a little about the craft of writing a picture book? You are also a television writer; do the skills complement each other or merge into one another at any point?

JP: Writing for TV/video and having to think visually helps a lot in writing picture books because the images play such a key role in the storytelling. When writing nonfiction scripts, I have a column for the words/sound and a column for the footage/images. This format helps me see the story visually when writing picture books, but in the final manuscript, art notes are generally not encouraged. The artist will read the manuscript and interpret it with their own creative vision. So, after I write all the art notes, which help me figure out the whole story, I go back and take them all out.

This is all just in general, and there are always exceptions. In nonfiction, I think art notes are actually preferred. I wrote two nonfiction picture books that I actually submitted with all the rough visuals – photos and layout. This is usually not what agents and editors want from [writers who are not] author-illustrators. But because of the specific nature of the book, I felt like you have to see the images to see why kids would love this kind of book.

Another way that writing for TV/video helps with picture book writing is that you are working with time/length constraints. The video has to be 20 or two minutes, and you have to tell the story, deliver the content within the timeframe. In picture book writing, you have 32 pages and ideally under 500 words. The Juna books are longer, but I know that's not the norm, and, like I said, there are always exceptions!

TW: What's next for you?

JP: *Juna and Appa* comes out in May. *Hidden Animal Colors* comes out in spring 2022 and *Hidden Animal Features* in fall 2022. They're playful animal books, but the underlying message is to pay attention to the overlooked, which is a theme that drives most of my work.

I'd love to create another Juna story and have been working on a third manuscript. I would love to see more adventures with Juna navigating her emotions and her fantastic worlds. Also, having worked on several animal TV shows for kids, including creating an original show featuring a diverse group of kids on adventure (Nickelodeon bought and made a pilot, but it didn't go to series), it would be a dream to me to have Juna as an animated wildlife series.

The Nightstand

Recommended reading from Vanessa Hua

Author and *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Vanessa Hua has had a very busy few years. Her book of short stories, *Deceit and Other Possibilities*, was published in 2016 and then reissued in 2020, and her debut novel, *River of Stars*, was published in 2018. She was a National Endowment for the Arts grantee in 2019, and her next novel, *Forbidden City*, will be published in April. Since the pandemic started, she has been learning how to forage. We asked her to list five must-read books by East Asian writers, and she gave us a range of work that will have us reading long into the night.

***Tastes Like War*, Grace M. Cho (The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2021).**
This memoir is "at once lyrical and scholarly," says Hua. Cho's mother had been a camp girl during the Korean War, which led later to some emotional and mental difficulties, which were never discussed or treated. After immigrating to the United States, Cho's mother made a home in rural Washington state, where she became interested in foraging. "She [would go] out into the forest and find familiar [to her] greens, and then [she] also launched a whole blackberry selling and blackberry pie business... In a way, it was like she wasn't accepted necessarily by the community until she began to feed them...it just keys into some of my interest, not only as a forager but just sort of the ways that history and lineages continue to shape us and are sometimes suppressed, and what the consequences of that are."

***The Memory Police*, Yoko Ogawa (Vintage, 2020).**
This dystopian novel was a finalist for the National Book Award and winner of the American Book Award. (Ogawa is a Japanese novelist whose works are widely available in translation.) *The Memory Police* is set in a world where "whole orders of things disappear by some unknown order, or by fiat, and...the people who remember these things are also being taken away," says Hua. "It's bleak, but there's also resistance; it's thinking about art and beauty."

***Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, Malinda Lo (Dutton Books for Young Readers, 2021).**
Hua's YA pick, a queer romance, takes place in mid-1950s San Francisco. When 17-year-old Lily Hu discovers the lesbian club scene in Chinatown, the need to live her own truth threatens everything from her friendships to her father's citizenship status. "I know that neighborhood really well," says Hua, "having written about it in *A River of Stars*. [And] I knew about the whole red scare, where, you know, people with links to communist China were being questioned for their loyalties, even though they're naturalized citizens, their papers being taken away. It's all very reminiscent in some ways in terms of what happened sort of in the current moment but also just beautifully rendered." Hua notes that this work will appeal to both adult and young adult readers (it won the National Book Award in the young adult category).

***Fiona and Jane*, Jean Chen Ho (Viking, 2022).**
"This is a [book] about female friendship," says Hua, "and it takes place in southern Los Angeles County. Not Disneyland, not Hollywood, but, you know, the place where people actually *live*." Hua also credits this "funny, poignant" book with another characteristic: "We see [the characters] come together, drift apart, come into their sexuality, dealing with family stuff... [And] there's very little talk of older notions of Asian-American narratives where it's like 'bringing shame to the family.' It's not really positioned that way. It feels right, like this is just the way people are. It's not typical to find these depictions."

***We Should Never Meet*, Aimee Phan (Picador, 2005).**
Phan's collection of eight linked short stories is anchored by "Operation Babylift," during which thousands of Vietnamese children were evacuated from Vietnam in 1975 to be adopted by American, Canadian, European, and Australian families. "I love the historical nature of [this book]," says Hua. "So often, the perspective of the Vietnam War is told by that of the soldiers or by principally the American soldiers." Hua also appreciates the collection's linked structure: "There's always a delight with linked stories: 'Oh, when is this character going to appear again? Or, will I learn something in this chapter that makes me completely rethink what I read before?' This collection is full of places like that, full of delights like that."

PANTSER

"At heart, I would have to say I'm a pantser. I fully embrace the chaos of letting the unintended happen, on life and on the page."

– MARGARET STOHL

OR PLOTTER?

Which writing style is right for you?

By Jack Smith

When you write a story or a novel, you're undoubtedly focused on turning out a good one. That's the product. But what about the process? Are you a so-called plotter, one who creates summaries and outlines before clicking out your story or novel? Or are you a so-called pantser, one who follows your intuition or your instinct, seeing where that takes you? Or are you both – a "plantser?"

We were curious to know where five well-published authors stand on this issue. Which are they, plotter or pantser? What do they see as the upsides and downsides of both creative processes?

WHETHER YOU'RE A PANTSER OR A plotter might depend on your genre or on the stage of your draft, regardless of genre. You might be a pantser in one case and a plotter in another.

When writing literary fiction, Grant Tracey, author of several novels, confesses to being "mainly a seat-of-my-pants writer" with an eye toward discovery: "I start with a destabilizing condition that places the lead character under duress and then pursue the story's inner journey. Following the characters' impulses, I make discoveries as they do."

Interestingly, however, when writing crime fiction, he becomes more of a plantser. He still believes in letting the characters evolve on their own, without an outline on hand, yet he does see the need to impose some structure – namely, author Syd Field's three-act structure for screenwriting. "There have to be two turning points that spin the lead character off in new directions. I don't know ahead of time what those deflections are, but I know they will occur."

Anthony Varallo, a prize-winning short story writer and novelist, is also a plantser. When he's working on a novel, he likes to have a sense for where he's going "but not know how I'm going to get there, exactly, or what I might find once I arrive." For example, in his debut novel, *The Lines*, he knew at the outset that the timeframe of the main plot would run approximately four months. Knowing this helped him determine the length of each scene as well as how each scene would fit with other scenes "along a timeline," yet, critically, "not what would happen in each scene." In the pantser vein, he says, "I didn't try to prescribe what the characters might do, even as I understood how long they had to do whatever it was they were going to do." Instead, with "no plan in mind," he depended on them to lead him along from one plot development to another – "with the timeline sort of thrumming beneath the events."

In her early novel drafts, novelist Marjan Kamali is a pantser, but when she moves into the revision stage, she carefully plots. "When I started my first novel, *Together Tea,* I had the title and a vague idea that I wanted to write a mother-daughter immigration story." She discovered the rest of her novel as she drafted it. "Once the story was down, I put on my plotting hat to restructure the narrative."

Her process was the same with her second novel, *The Stationery Shop*. Again, she began with very little: "I knew I wanted to write a love story set in 1953 Iran, where two teenagers fall in love in a stationery shop. I also had an image of an elderly man in Massachusetts wanting to see again his first love from 60 years ago. That's all I had. The rest of the story came once I started writing." Once she'd written the first draft, she turned plotter, thinking "hard about how to rearrange the scenes in order to create maximum emotional impact on the reader."

Midge Raymond, novelist and author of the prize-winning short story

TRACEY: MITCHELL D. STRAUSS

GRANT TRACEY:

"Don't just chase the action narrative. Track down the inner journey. Live in it. Breathe in what your protagonist breathes."

collection *Forgetting English*, always begins as a plotter. With her journalism background, she tends to pose questions like "what's the opening line or scene, what's the point, who's my audience, etc." Yet, says Raymond, "as with journalism, you're never quite sure where the story's going to take you once you begin researching – and this is true of fiction as well."

Even though she knew how her debut novel, *My Last Continent*, would end, the rest of it was a surprise. "Despite all my meticulous planning and outlining, the finished book wasn't even close to my outline," she says.

During the drafting process, she became a pantser, following her intuition, which resulted in substantial changes from her pre-planned novel: "I changed points of view, added and deleted characters, and changed the structure almost entirely. But I'm so glad I did the outlining because that helped get me get started, and it gave me some direction – otherwise, I might still be staring at a blank page!"

Yet the pantser route, at whatever stage or in whatever genre, doesn't work for some writers. As a beginning writer, A.E. Copenhaver, author of *My Days of Dark Green Euphoria*, found this method unproductive. For her, it led to "a hundred thousand words of amorphous writing" with "no coherence or cohesion." With so little to show for her three years' effort, she "dramatically switched" from pantser to plotter.

She's now a "strict plotter." If she has a novel idea in mind, she drafts a "proposal" – for her eyes only – instead of jumping right into the writing itself. "I explain what I hope the novel will accomplish, the cast of characters, the themes, a short summary, a long summary, some structure concepts, maybe even some scene ideas. On occasion, a character might end up veering off-script, but that is rare and short-lived." For her, being a plotter is a lot more efficient because once she's completed her planning, "the novel essentially writes itself."

BEING A PANTSER WORKS FOR SOME writers – at some stages of the process and with some forms or genres. What are some upsides and downsides of this method? How do seasoned writers rate this discovery method?

Though she's a committed plotter, Copenhaver can see why some writers are pantsers – due to the "blistering efficiency of it." However your story turns out, you've come up with something, "all without spending weeks or months planning," and, she says, "that's appealing."

What are some other specific benefits?

One is the element of surprise. According to Varallo, "if you don't plot your novel in advance, your novel will be more open to surprise as you draft it. As the saying goes, 'No surprise for the writer means no surprise for the reader.'"

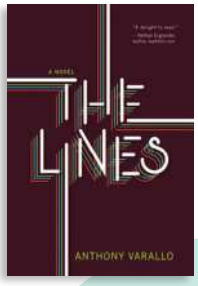
The payoff comes in characterization, with the ability "to discover more about your characters, with greater insight and psychological depth, than if you tried to make them conform to the plot in the early drafts." The pantser method "allows your characters 'the open destiny of life,' as Grace Paley might say."

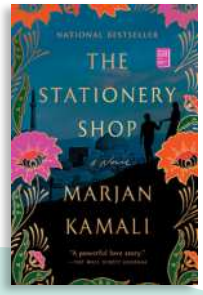
Along the same lines, for Tracey, being a pantser helps you avoid focusing on plot and instead getting into your characters, into their "inner story." In his forthcoming novel *Neon Kiss*, he knew who the killer was "from the outset," but as he drafted this mystery novel, the "reasons for the killing changed," and, as a result, "a different

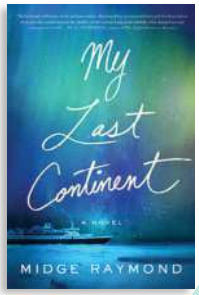
RAYMOND: JOHN YUNKER

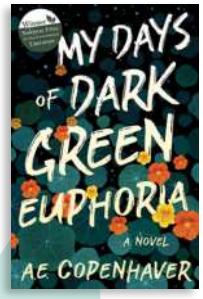
MIDGE RAYMOND:

"If you're a plotter, try letting go of your outline and seeing where it takes you – if you give yourself the time and space for a total abandonment of all plans, it can be so much fun, even if it turns out to be only an exercise in the end. And if you're a pantser, try outlining a story or chapter and see if you find that it makes you more effective or efficient or focused in your storytelling."









ANTHONY VARALLO:

"In my experience, the best approach is to blend both styles, plotter and pantser. Be open to plotting in advance and equally open to letting the next sentence lead you where it may."

truth emerged: a story of abuse, a brother's obsessive control and domination of his younger sister." The pantser approach helped him turn out a novel he hadn't originally imagined – and, as he sees it, a better one.

If being a pantser can help with character interiority, it can also be an adventure, says Raymond. "The fun thing," she says, is "letting the characters go where they want, letting the story take wild and unexpected turns, discovering an entire backstory you didn't know was there." In her story "Lost Art," from *Forgetting English*, she had "no idea" where this story was headed until she began drafting it. "I began with nothing more than an image from an art show I'd seen in Sydney, Australia – a tiny, intriguing sculpture captured my attention, and I couldn't stop thinking about it. It eventually became a story about siblings, addiction, love, art, family dysfunction, and travel, among other things." The adventure, the real fun, says Raymond, was "learning how all of these ideas wove together and how everything I added to the story connected to the piece of art that inspired it."

With the panster approach, there's a "particular magic" that you can experience, says Kamali, the kind that "is hard to capture if you plan ahead." She found this magic when she was writing *The Stationery Shop,* discovering "twists and turns" that absolutely surprised her. These tended to be emotionally charged moments. "I would literally gasp or cry at my desk as characters died on me or made decisions I could never have consciously predicted. The process was intense, emotional, and healing in a way that it couldn't have been had I planned the story out ahead of time. I wouldn't trade that high for the world."

But, as with most things in creative writing, which is a complex art, you need to consider potential downsides. We've seen some plusses. What about minuses?

One is a plotless novel, says Varallo. If you begin the work without a plan, your characters will very likely "spin their wheels at times," which will lead to a novel without the "necessary energy to keep a reader engaged." Keep this in mind, he says: "If you prefer to make it up as you go along, your revision skills need to be top-notch. You might bang out a first draft of a novel in a matter of weeks or months – but you will likely need to spend a year revising it."

As Copenhaver puts it, "pantsing can leave you with gobs of words but no story," meaning "you might end up having to do some planning but after you've already written so much and done so much work."

For Tracey, the problem with pantsing is that "you have to live in uncertainty and be confident that a plot and inner journey will emerge. You trust in impulses and instincts. If uncertainty makes you uncomfortable, then this isn't the approach for you."

According to Kamali, "while the highs are high when you're having a great writing day and discovering the story, the lows of being stuck and not knowing how to move the story forward can be pretty demoralizing at times."

Raymond adds that "pantsing can be difficult for writers on deadline – all that pressure!" If she has a revision deadline, she turns to plotting in order to see "what needs to be accomplished." She says being a pantser is similar to being in a maze, where you can lose all sense of direction: "You start out in one direction, hit a dead end, and then backtrack or try another route." Although "this is part of the discovery process and leads to so many good revelations and insights," it's got a definite downside if a deadline is near.

THERE ARE SEVERAL UPSIDES TO BEing a plotter – emotional ones, for one thing. Affective ones, like inspiration. If nothing else, says Raymond, "plotting helps me get going – it gives me a starting point, which for many writers is the hardest part. I don't mind if things go off track – for me, the *idea* of plotting is more important than the plotting itself, simply because it jumpstarts the story."

A.E. COPENHAVER:

"With enough enthusiasm and organization, planning or plotting your novel can be just as enjoyable and rewarding as writing it."

VARALLO: MIKE LEDFORD; COPENHAVER: ROXANNE ARNOT-COPENHAVER

According to Kamali, being a plotter surely "makes it easier to face the blank page because you already have a sense of what to tackle."

Practically speaking, you'll have a clear direction from the outset, says Varallo, "which will save you several steps of drafting to achieve that effect." Compared to the panster method, he says, it's like "driving on the interstate to get to your destination versus taking a rural route: you'll get there quicker on the highway, although you'll miss some of the view."

For Copenhaver, the strengths of plotting "come from doing all the difficult and tedious thinking ahead of time." Having plotted a work, she says, "I never find myself wondering what will happen next, and I rarely ever write stories into a dead end." A thorough job of plotting pays off, she says: "If I've done all my planning correctly and I'm finally ready to write, I end up sitting down at my desk, looking at the outline of the novel, and then just writing what the outline tells me to write on that day." She compares this experience to "having someone telling me what to do, which is great for me."

According to Tracey, being a plotter "can save an author a great deal of wasted energy. You aren't inventing constantly to stay alive in the story and see where the action line is headed." But beyond that, he says, "investing in known plot structures can be a fun pattern to break and vary." If you're writing a crime novel, for instance, you can profit from being aware of the "scaffolding" of successful crime novelists.

These are the plusses. As with being a pantser, there are potential downsides.

"Trying to plot any novel in advance risks closing the narrative off to possibility," says Varallo. "After all, once you say what the plot of your novel will be, you are inherently saying what the plot will *not* be, and that can be a problem." Furthermore, he says, "it's unlikely that your characters will 'agree' with the plot you've got planned out for them. If they have any life in them whatsoever – and you want lively, multi-dimensional characters who contain contradictory impulses and drives – they will rebel against the plot you've got planned for them." Be careful, he warns, against "too much intentionality" – it can "stifle your novel."

MARJAN KAMALI:

"Sometimes writers are afraid of allowing themselves to be pantsers because they're worried they'll 'waste time' writing material they won't use, but any time spent getting to know your characters better is not wasted. Writing is not an efficient process, nor should it be – efficiency does not necessarily create great art."

Tracey concurs. Be careful not to box your characters in, he states. You have to "remain open to the process of really listening to your characters and letting them breathe. In dialogue, they might surprise you, say something unexpected. Allow that to occur." Furthermore, he says, "allow yourself to go where you hadn't intended to go." Be open to unplanned character developments: "If you're not truly listening to the inner lives of your characters, then the writing will become overdetermined and the character outcomes predictable." Keep these two ideas in mind, says Tracey: "Inevitable is good. Predictable is boring."

Raymond also agrees. "Plotting becomes a challenge when you try to make the story or the characters fit into what you've planned out – if things are too carefully outlined, you risk losing authenticity and spontaneity by forcing characters or plots to stick with your plans." For the "most meticulous of plotters," she says, "I'd recommend surrendering to the story and the characters on occasion."

According to Kamali, "one weakness of being a plotter is that you can commit to a plot that is perhaps not best for the characters." You don't want to back yourself into a corner, she says. What you plot out might not be the best you can do. She advises against labeling yourself plotter or pantser. "I've found that refraining from labeling yourself as one or another can help because it gives you freedom to alter how you write depending on the stage of the draft or the particular project."

Despite her adherence to plotting, Copenhaver can see a downside to it: "planning, or plotting, comes with the risk of over-planning or over-plotting – as in, a writer could spend years thinking about a novel instead of writing it. Planning requires intuiting when you've done enough preparation so that the novel is ready to write itself. And then you do have to write it!"

Your own creative process

If you're a beginning writer, you might not have determined your creative process yet. You're still trying to find your way around what you want to say and how to say it. Being a plotter is a rational approach; being a pantser is an intuitive one. Which suits you best? Give each a try. You might be one or the other – or both.

Jack Smith is the author of six novels, four books of nonfiction, and numerous reviews, articles, and interviews.

KAMALI: DAVID E. LAWRENCE

#BookTok

How to win at TikTok – and reach your readers, too.

By Melissa Hart

SVETABELAVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

When I first learned about TikTok from my teenager, I didn't believe it could do anything for me, or I for it. I can't dance to save my life, and the social media platform – on which users post short videos – seemed to me to be merely a pleasurable pastime replete with pop songs and enviable hip hop routines. How wrong I was.

TikTok, which originated in China in 2016, helps spotlight the creative work of an international cast of actors and singers, artists and writers, scholars, activists, and, yes, dancers. While Gen Z and millennials make up much of its user base, plenty of older people use it as well. (See veteran actor Mandy Patinkin, @mandypatinktok, twerking to get out the vote in October 2020.)

#BookTok serves as both a hashtag enabling authors to promote their work to readers on the platform and a landing place for book lovers to meet and get to know one another in a casual atmosphere that feels less formal and less inflammatory than, say, Twitter. The platform costs nothing to use, and it's done plenty to launch the literary careers of debut authors, as well as boosting book sales for established writers. Below, three authors share their experiences and plenty of tips so that you can launch your own TikTok channel...no dancing required.

CASEEN GAINES, AUTHOR OF *FOOTnotes: The Black Artists Who Rewrote the Rules of the Great White Way,* had no interest in TikTok despite encouragement from his wife to make an account with book promotion in mind. "I'd seen all of the dances and trends," Gaines says. "And I was like, 'I want absolutely no part of this.'"

But then his publisher, Sourcebooks, offered a webinar on how authors can engage on the platform. "There is a really wonderful community of people on TikTok who use the platform for information," he says. "There are lots of amazing storytellers, and I don't just mean authors. People are talking about politics and their kids, and whatever the case may be."

Gaines was so impressed that he made his first video directly after the webinar. Rather than use his account to post a series of commercials for his books, he decided to offer short videos devoted to little-known Black history and popular culture. "That's what I write about a lot, and it seemed to work out well," he explains. "My first video [about Black suffragettes, Aug. 18, 2021] had over 3,000 views. Once I got that immediate gratification, I was off to the races."

Readers invest in authors, Gaines says, and TikTok has turned out to be an excellent way to reach people. "When you're talking to a camera for a minute, viewers get a sense of your personality. TikTok is personality-driven," he explains. "The people who do the best are those who are interesting to watch."

Since he joined the platform, he's noticed a discernible increase in sales, particularly when he makes a video related to something he's written about. "For example, I did a minute-long TikTok on a little-known story about how [the TV show] *Pee-wee's Playhouse* led to director John Singleton casting Laurence Fishburne in *Boyz n the Hood*," he says. "It's a story that's also told in a book I wrote called *Inside Pee-wee's Playhouse*, and when I saw all of these comments from readers, I was able to comment back and let them know

about the book." To date, Gaines' TikTok titled "Boyz n the Playhouse" (Aug. 27, 2021) has 196K views.

MIDDLE GRADE AND YOUNG ADULT author Claribel Ortega stands in her bathroom soberly adjusting the sleeves of her blue dress shirt while a popular audio clip from the film *Mean Girls* plays in the background. "In girl world," the narrator says, "Halloween is the one night a year when a girl can dress like a total slut, and no other girls can say anything about it."

Ortega cuts to shots in which she places a fuzzy brown wig on her head and then pastes on a brown beard. A final shot shows her standing in front of a Bob Ross painting video on TV, dressed like the iconic artist and "painting" a landscape canvas mounted around her friend's head. "I love editing videos and just making funny stuff related to my books," she says. "Doing promo can be difficult as an author, and I feel like you have to be having fun with the stuff that you're doing."

Ortega, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Ghost Squad* and *Witchlings*, started making TikTok videos out of boredom during the COVID-19 pandemic. She already loved making videos on Twitter and Instagram. "I know a lot of writers say that social media doesn't make a difference in book sales, and I super don't agree with that," she says. "We're not powerless as authors."

She counts herself lucky to have grown up as a digital native; it's second nature to film herself doing the things she enjoys, she explains. "But book promotion can feel like an additional job, so that's why I always tried to have as much fun as I can because I'm already working so hard on writing," she says. "I might as well have a good time during the few moments in which I have some sort of control in publishing."

TikTok has allowed Ortega to connect with younger readers, as well as with teens and adults who read kidlit. She often uses the platform to give writing advice based on what she's experienced as a professional author. She's filmed herself talking about manuscript revision, posted a video in which she sees her LGBTQIA anthology for the first time, and offers her thoughts on hybrid publishing. Once, she documented an intense writing deadline in a month's worth of videos. "I updated my followers every day, telling them how much I wrote and what my process was like, and it was really cool because a lot of people got very involved," she says.

"I know a lot of writers say that social media doesn't make a difference in book sales, and I super don't agree with that. We're not powerless as authors."

TikTok invites fun and playful community interaction – different from Twitter, she notes. "Twitter had been a really great place to foster community. But in recent years, I feel like it's become a lot more contentious," she explains. "It's hard to talk on there without ruffling feathers, and TikTok gave me an outlet for talking about my books and my writing in a fun way that was a lot less scary."

Her followers include tween and teen readers as well as parents and librarians and teachers. That last demographic has embraced TikTok so wholeheartedly that at press time, videos with the hashtag #TeachersOfTikTok had 18.4 billion views. "A lot of teachers comment on my videos," Ortega says. "Some tell me they've just discovered my book, or their classes are reading my book right now and love it. It's cool to be able to interact with them."

ASHLEIGH RENARD, AUTHOR OF *Swing: A Memoir of Doing It All*, joined TikTok at the end of September 2020. She posts very short videos with titles including "How to Keep Monogamy Hot Before You Get a Divorce" and "How I Get My Kids to Clean the House."

"The cool thing about TikTok is that it's not a super-curated feed like you'd find on Instagram. It's a little scrappier," Renard says. "TikTok doesn't have the same filters you'd find on Instagram, so everything is a little more raw, a little bit more uncut. You can just show up how you are and say something interesting in a few seconds, and people will latch onto it."

Renard spent 23 years as a figure skating coach and choreographer, and she adores being on camera. She's cognizant of the fact that the most popular TikTok users grab viewers' attention in the first few seconds – similar, she observes, to the most successful figure skating routines. "From two decades of coaching adolescents, if you give me 30 seconds, I can disarm you and tell you something with a slant that maybe you've never heard before, then motivate you to take the action that I think would be good for you and maybe make you laugh," she says.

Her most popular videos offer quick, pithy advice about intimate relationships and sex. "My book is about a failed attempt at non-monogamy," she says, "and my first TikTok video was about how to keep monogamy hot." She's noticed a definite boost in book sales since she joined the platform, dependent on individual videos. "When I make a video that gets

a lot of views and is shared a lot, that bumps my sales numbers – including my ranking on Amazon – more than anything," she says.

Renard compares the platform to a great house party. "When someone finds your video, they go over to your corner of TikTok, and they poke around and ask, 'What's this person about? I like this person.' And when they click your link in bio and visit your website, they feel like you're already friends. They say something like, 'Oh, yeah, I definitely want to get Ashley's book. She's like the cool new person I just met at that house party.'"

RENARD ASSURES WRITERS THAT they don't need to be trained performers to connect with people through video. Nor do they need a sexy topic. "If you can make a friend on an airplane, if you can make a connection with a stranger at a writers' conference, you can connect and find your audience on TikTok," she explains. "The platform doesn't care if you're popular. All they care about is if you made something that was entertaining."

She likens TikTok videos to writing flash nonfiction. "Every single word matters," she says. "If you want people to watch all the way through, you have to give them this tiny little narrative arc and drop them exactly where you want them at the end of a 30-second video. Every step of the way, give people something unexpected, something they didn't know they wanted."

She makes a video almost daily, and the process takes her about 15 minutes. She records multiple camera angles in the natural light that streams into her home office on afternoons. "When the camera changes from angle to angle, it triggers something in the brain to keep you interested," she says. "My first sentence is always the title that appears in my cover image. People think, 'Oh, I want to know more about that,' and click on the video." She captions each scene in her video manually so that viewers can watch it without sound.

Ortega also posts on TikTok several times a week. It takes her about 20 minutes to film and edit a short video, unless she's staging a more involved piece, as in the day that Barnes & Noble declared *Ghost Squad* a Book of the Month, and she and a friend filmed a humorous multi-scene video on location (Oct. 5, 2021).

She tells writers to study what other authors are doing and then post consistently, interacting with people on the platform once or twice a week. "Don't try to be something that you're not, and don't try to be too salesy on there. Just have fun with it," she says. "And tap into your strengths. You don't have to do a dance. If you're good at cooking, do a video series where you cook something inspired by a book or a scene in your book. Just be yourself."

Gaines says it takes him up to three hours to record and edit his TikTok videos. "Sometimes I try to be very topical. Other times, I'm more free-flowing, but that also requires a little bit of research," he explains. "When you're trying to teach something in an entertaining way in less than a minute, that requires – at least for me – quite a bit of reshooting and editing. I always want to put more information in, and I have to remind myself that it's social media, and it's meant to sort of be edutainment. It's just a little morsel."

One of the tips he gleaned from his publisher's webinar is that the TikTok algorithm prefers videos between 30 to 60 seconds. "Three-minute videos are all well and good, but they don't necessarily help you to get in front of more eyeballs," he says. "As a writer, I'm used to having a word count, and so it's part of the exercise, in a sense. I should be able to give you something of value in 60 seconds or less. That, to me, feels like a good challenge."

Gaines uses carefully chosen hashtags like #BlackHistory and #PopCulture, and – of course – #BookTok. He also suggests paying attention to trends on the platform. "Sometimes, there are certain songs that are really popular, and if a user clicks the song, they'll see all of the videos that use the same music," he explains. When he used Lukas Graham's trending song *Mama Said* as the background music for a September 2021 slideshow of photos showcasing Black Broadway performers in the 1920s, his video received 2,360 likes and 40 comments, many of which were thank-you notes to Gaines for his educational and inspiring video.

STILL AS SKEPTICAL OF TIKTOK AS I used to be? Gaines suggests just trying the platform out; after all, he notes, you can always delete your video. "If you're a storyteller, this really is your medium," he says. "Give it a go, and I think you'll be pleasantly surprised at how welcoming people can be."

Melissa Hart is the author, most recently, of Better with Books: 500 Diverse Books to Ignite Empathy and Encourage Self-Acceptance in Tweens and Teens. *Follow her on TikTok @melissamhart.*

The Power of #BookTok

Think TikTok isn't worth your time? Think again. Videos from authors and reader/reviewers alike – especially when they're tagged #BookTok – have catapulted authors onto bestseller lists for both new titles and backlisted work. The site has also provide crucial to reaching younger readers. Bookstores have taken note, too – Barnes & Noble features regular displays of books trending on TikTok.

A brand-new ending

Read the grand-prize winner of our annual essay contest.

By Virginia DeLuca

SPRINTERBJ / SHUTTERSTOCK

Sexy. Whenever I think of Perry and how it was, I think sexy. The thought makes me smile. A buoyant inner smile, almost smug. Falling in love at 47 and marrying at 52 is both miraculous and terrifying.

But, then, falling in love is always miraculous and terrifying. In your 50s, it just comes with an end date built-in.

Oh, some people claim that 50 is the new 30 and all that. But, for me, when Perry and I married, I was keenly aware that one of us was going to have to usher the other out. Maybe not for another 30 years or so, knock on wood, but Perry's parents both died in their early 60s. I'd buried many loved ones already. I just wanted it to be Perry ushering me out.

I should have remembered: *Be careful what you wish for.*

Before meeting Perry, I'd go about my day, striding between work meetings and appointments, feeling dumpy. In flats with knee-length skirts and suit jackets, I felt...well, old. After meeting Perry, I strode in those same flat shoes with my soft belly, my fleshy hips, and my upper arms jiggling, and I felt, well... sexy. Even my brown curls bounced.

Of course, nothing about my body had changed, but I felt altogether different. The openness of our desire, the undeniable fact of it, was a gift. I wasn't just enamored with Perry; I was hooked on who I became while with him. Sensual. Adventurous. Brave.

When we first met, Perry was tan from playing tennis. Dark forearms and neck. He had pale blue eyes with deep laugh lines. Barrel chested with thighs like tree trunks, he was 5-foot-10 to my 5-foot-5. We fit well together.

Perry taught English as a Second Language in New Hampshire. Kids in their early teens arrived from all parts of the world speaking no English. Perry exuded calm. Complemented by kind eyes, his smile said *everything will be OK*.

I was a psychotherapist, and, like Perry, I was skilled at soothing people in crisis, helping them recognize they had the strength to deal with whatever life hurled at them.

Over the years, Perry and I developed an easy rhythm. Our routines were not uncommon. We spent entire weekend afternoons exploring the local library and drinking coffee at our local café, Breaking New Grounds. We walked the beaches of Maine and sketched the rocks at low tide. We cooked together, nothing fancy. We ate copious amounts of broccoli and broiled chicken, both relishing and feeling virtuous in our healthful simplicity. Occasionally, we ate popcorn for dinner as we read books by the fire.

We took care of each other, inconsequential things: me, placing a water glass on his bedside table; him, refilling my coffee as I wrote in the morning.

We touched each other often, like shorthand. *I'm here. I'm here.*

FOURTEEN YEARS ALMOST TO THE day we met, Perry sits across from me on the couch as he delivers my morning coffee. He leans forward as if he's about to say something, but instead, he sinks back and remains silent. "What's up?" I invite.

He breathes in. "I want a divorce; I'm not attracted to you anymore; I want children of my own." His words whoosh out, as though he's practiced them and must speak fast, afraid he'll forget one.

"What?" Dread, immediate and physical, lands in my solar plexus. My mind skitters, like a rock skimmed over tranquil water. I can't make sense of his

sounds. It's as though he's speaking in a foreign language. I wonder if this is how his students feel – shocked by the words coming at them too quickly.

He continues to talk. I catch snippets: *just realized…last chance…* He's babbling.

When faced with disaster, I become hyper-focused, with excellent diction. In times of crisis, I exhibit supernatural composure. I'm the person you want around when a kid cracks his head on the radiator and blood spurts everywhere. It's the skill of dissociation, learned early in childhood, and, if employed judiciously, very handy.

"Is there a mother for these children?" I ask, reaching for my coffee as if this is a casual conversation.

"No," he says. "But I want to be free to pursue someone."

I grip my mug, feeling light-headed.

Is Perry leaving after 14 years to make babies?

This can't be. He's 60 years old.

"Can I grab a few things?" he asks. "I just…need some stuff…for the hotel." He looks visibly relieved there isn't more of a scene.

Five minutes later, he walks out with his gym duffle.

I begin calling everyone I know.

"Perry asked for a divorce because he wants babies," I announce. "I'm so disoriented," I repeat this over and over.

I thought I was someone who could read people, who understood people. I'm a goddamn therapist. Just two weeks ago, we celebrated our 14 years together. We held hands on the beach, laughing as the frigid water caught our feet, talking about our future. Just yesterday morning, he suggested we change our cable package so we could watch the Red Sox this summer.

"Maybe he has a brain tumor," says one friend.

"He's having an affair," announces another.

"Clearly, it's a nervous breakdown."

"He already knocked someone up," one decides.

"Could he have a urinary tract infection? Old people get psychotic from them." (This, from a younger friend, who thought of 60 as elderly. I forgave her.)

"He's an asshole," Ricky, my best friend, tells me.

But Perry was never an asshole. He's the most gentle, caring man I've ever known.

SIXTY IS THE AGE OF LEAVING THE house and returning for the car keys, the age of *have you seen my glasses?* The age of sudden, unwanted diagnoses. Who leaves a marriage at this point? Accepting old age is considered sinful. We exercise, eat organic, and pretend we can make youth last. I'd imagined us together till the end, laughing and commiserating as we handled the shifts and tweaks aging requires.

Some, hoping to postpone death, topple their lives. There are names for this group: *gray divorce*, *silver splitters.* Heartbreak hurtles me back into shaky adolescence – not the youth I want to revisit.

During one sloppy call, both of us weeping over what a wonderful life we'd had together, I ask him in desperation, "Why can't you try to get what you want here? With me?"

"You can't give me babies."

No, that I can't do.

Grief-land is its own territory. It's lonely and filled with steep, treacherous, rocky paths and lots of mosquitoes. It rains often.

There are no caves to crawl into and get dry. There's no place to sleep. One must keep trudging and trudging. Occasionally, one meets another person in this land, but often they're not in the mood to talk. Our heads face down, watching our feet, plodding.

Because, over there, just over the next rise, or possibly the next, it's sunny with cool breezes that blow away the mosquitoes. There are hot boulders to lean against for warmth. People smile and hold your hand over the rough patches. They feed you soup and tell you it will be OK. You'll be OK.

Everyone's dragged into Grief-land at some point, but no one enters willingly.

By the time we're in our 60s, most of us have spent time in Grief-land.

I have. So, I trust that the sunny place over the rise is truly there and all I have to do is keep walking.

But I haven't even entered Grief-land yet. I'm in some anteroom, I name Howl-land. A long wail of repeated questions. What did I miss? What did I do wrong?

As we move through the divorce, as he waffles about coming back, as his narrative shifts, I reconstruct my understanding of our past and unearth a revised future.

When I stomp around, bitter about the raw deal he dealt, anger and defeat own me. When I face how life is a wild ride – and appreciate the love in my life, then and now – I grow expansive and walk straight.

Starting with small actions, I build back my life. Nothing earth-shattering. Planting daisies. Going out with friends. Finishing my novel. Getting a promotion at work. Hunting dinosaurs with grandchildren.

When my youngest son gets engaged, he asks, "So, Mom, do you still believe in love and marriage?"

I want to take my time here. Each person we love takes a little piece of us and then they're careless, forget to look both ways, drink too much, climb mountain cliffs, or are otherwise negligent.

People die. They fall out of love. They leave.

We grieve.

The only way to avoid this pain is to avoid love. That is too hard a way to live.

"Yes," I say. "I do. It didn't work out for me, but I still think getting to know a person till the end of days is a superb endeavor." I pause and then say, "Love, alone, isn't enough. You need to be fearless."

Loss is such a constant, and yet such a mammoth concern. We protect against it. We put in smoke detectors and immunize our children. We try to be careful with money and don't curse out our boss.

So, when loss comes anyway, as it will, we blame. We judge. Why weren't you more careful? Why did you walk alone at night? Why didn't you recognize he was flawed?

These judgments aren't evil. They're our hope that if we do all things right, we'll be immune to devastating loss.

As time passes, people begin to ask if I'm seeing anyone – dating.

I understand the motivation. It's some version of getting back on the horse. A satisfying conclusion to this saga of lost love involves me meeting another love. It isn't a terrible notion.

Friends and family would relax. They'd stop worrying and cease imagining bleak, long, empty evenings for me.

Probably the only people who don't care if I am in a relationship or not are my grandchildren. I appreciate this.

Because a funny thing happened during my grief over Perry. I discovered I really like living alone. I found my way back to myself. Of course, it's difficult to describe being alone and happy without sounding like I'm trying to convince myself that low-fat yogurt tastes as delicious as ice cream. But I think there can be a gratifying ending with being in alliance with myself, my own desires, and the people I cherish.

I've taken to watching couples in their 60s walking and wishing them luck. I miss having our shared history, our private jokes, the look across a roomful of people that said, *I've got you.*

What I have instead – what I have created – is a life of connection with love. Not *a* love. Not *one* person. But a life of love, nonetheless. So many stories end with finding the right person; I want to end with luxuriating in the right me.

Six years after our divorce, I meet Perry for lunch. We eat lobster rolls, watching the gulls follow the tugboats on the river. It's May, and his tennis tan has begun. At 66, his hair, like mine, is mostly gray. He appears tired. It's nearing the end of the school year, and I'm sure he is exhausted.

He tells me he and his new wife are expecting twins. Perry will be a first-time father at 66. He'll unquestionably be way too busy to obsess about old age and dying. I hope he's bought good life insurance.

"Congratulations," I say.

The waiter clears our plates.

"Do you remember," I ask, "while we were married, I told you the next book I intended to write was about the gifts of later-in-life love?"

He nods.

"I still plan to write that book," I tell him. "Only now it has a different ending."

Virginia DeLuca is the author of the novel As If Women Mattered *and is working on a memoir about divorcing in her 60s.*

Interview: Virginia DeLuca

What was your writing process like for this essay? What was your revision process like?
With any writing I do, I borrow from Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* and title my initial attempt "shitty first draft." This allows me to grapple with half-formed thoughts and frees me from that inner critic. This essay was revised a lot. I couldn't begin to say how many drafts. Eventually, to end the tinkering, I set a deadline and gave it to my first readers. My wish for every writer is to have a few trusted people who will give honest feedback without being discouraging.

What's the most important thing you've learned about writing?
When I hesitate to write, when I avoid writing and clean the kitchen or make extremely urgent appointments to have my teeth cleaned, it is because I'm afraid. I'm afraid what I have to say is irrelevant and self-indulgent. It's important to write through that fear. Being honest and telling stories through any art form means connection. And connecting with others is most important.

What's your best advice for fellow essayists and memoirists?
Be fearless. Believe your stories have value and are worth telling. Don't hesitate to join writing classes and find your group of trusted readers who can both encourage and be honest about early drafts.

A YEAR'S WORTH OF *inspiration*

Everything has its season – including writing prompts. No matter if you're craving more time for personal reflection in your nonfiction, story-starting launchpads for your fiction, or professional organization in your writing life, this seasonal-driven selection of exercises will keep your creative wells filled all year long.

HILARYANTEDESIGN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Winter

"Winter is a season of recovery and preparation."

—PAUL THEROUX

PERSONAL

1. Write about a memory that epitomizes cozy for you. What makes this memory feel so warm and snug? What concrete details can you add to make the scene feel lushly atmospheric on the page?

2. The dark and cold of winter can make it a hated season for many. If winter is something you tolerate instead of celebrate, what makes it pass easier for you? What helps spring come a little more quickly? If you were giving advice to someone enduring their first winter in your climate, what insights would you offer them?

3. What is your favorite winter activity? How would you describe it to someone who had never encountered it before? How could you describe the joy it brings you?

4. What did Valentine's Day mean to you as a child, and what does it mean to you now? Write about a particularly memorable Valentine's Day you experienced; alternatively, write about your relationship (or lack thereof) with the controversial holiday.

5. What metaphorical stores do you find running low this time of year? Do you notice a lack of inspiration, motivation, ambition, or cheer? Which tanks start to feel depleted as the dark days drag on? Making note of them now, in the dead of winter, will help you better prepare for next year when autumn rolls around.

PROFESSIONAL

1. Take some time in the first quarter of the year to sort out your goals for 2022. How would you like to organize the year's intentions and deadlines: By month, by season, by first half and second? Then ask: What would you like to accomplish and when? What tools and resources would help you hit your targets? What steps can you take in winter that will set you up for success all year long?

2. The start of a new year is a good time to establish any new boundaries you need to enforce, whether they're with clients, editors, or family members. Are you changing your professional policies or expected response times? Is now finally the time to establish how much you abhor phone calls instead of emails (or vice versa)? Do you need to claim more uninterrupted no-matter-what writing time for yourself? Tell the people in your writing life what you need to thrive – remember, they'll never know unless you tell them.

3. New year, new author website – or at least a newly refreshed one. Update the copyright year, add any new clips, re-evaluate your rates, post any upcoming professional events and appearances, and make sure everything's in good working order for the year ahead.

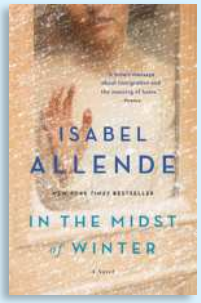
4. You hate it. We know. But don't let those unpaid invoices from 2021 languish for too long in the new year; now's the time to follow up on them.

5. The peace of post-holiday winter offers ideal conditions for research deep dives that demand quiet and focus. Go ahead, check out that nonfiction book you've been meaning to read. Pore over historical archives. Seek out a documentary or podcast series that will inform your work. Make a list of unanswered questions in your current writing project and identify the sources that will help you resolve them.

SEASONAL READS

In the Midst of Winter
by Isabel Allende

The Snow Child
by Eowyn Ivey



JUMP-STARTS

1. Snow isn't just pretty to look at: It can be a powerful fuel for a plot engine, too. Imagine a character who wants something desperately, but a sudden snowstorm throws a wrench in their plans. Are they headed to accept a stunning, career-changing award, and a blizzard cancels their flight? Is a trip to Labor and Delivery periled by an unexpected whiteout? Is

your protagonist suddenly snowbound with their worst enemy? The choice is yours – just make sure the stakes feel high and crystal-clear to both reader and characters.

2. Imagine someone who cannot abide the cold being forced to journey to the iciest of climates. What is their reaction to the weather? How does it feel? How does the temperature inform their actions? How can you describe the sensation of cold for someone who is unfamiliar or uncomfortable with it?

3. Alternatively, imagine a traditionally frigid landscape enduring a bizarre hot spell in winter, whether as a freak one-time event or a harbinger of a forever-changed climate. How does this change affect its residents? How do they cope? What changes are in store for this community?

4. Humans have recently developed the ability to hibernate. The mechanics of this discovery – the seasons that can be skipped, the reasoning behind it, the consequences of hibernation – are up to you. How does this discovery affect your character and the world they inhabit? Does your character decide to take advantage of it? Why or why not?

5. The Super Bowl may dominate wintertime sports sections, but it's far from the only athletic pursuit to be enjoyed in the colder months. Write about a character who participates in a lesser-known wintertime sport, be it luge, bobsledding, biathlon, or speed skating. Why do they feel drawn to this sport? What does it mean to them? What challenges must they overcome to achieve their athletic dreams?

Spring

"In the spring I have counted one hundred and thirty-six kinds of weather inside of four and twenty hours."

—MARK TWAIN

PERSONAL

1. What specific sensory detail outside your window tells you that spring has arrived? Is it the first wave of bright green grass, the smell of budding flowers, the song of the birds returning from winter? Write about the sensations that tell you spring has arrived as well as their impact on your emotions.

2. Write about a particularly memorable spring holiday, whether it's Easter, Passover, Nowruz, Mother's Day, etc. What about this day stands out in your memories now? Can you recall what the weather was like, what you ate, what you were wearing? What conversations did you have? What was the prevailing emotion of the day?

3. April showers may bring May flowers, but neither can come without the thawing mud of March. What metaphorical mud do you need to slog through in your writing life to reach spring this year? What needs to be treated and tilled so new creative life can grow?

4. After a long season of stark white and brittle brown, many of us hunger for any sign of green in the window. If you had to pick a favorite, which would you say is your favorite shade of

spring green? Is it the yellow-green color of tiny buds on the trees, the vivid shade of just-blanched asparagus, the rich emerald of clover? How would you describe that green and what it represents to someone who had never experienced it? Write a poem or a piece of flash nonfiction dedicated to this particular shade of spring green.

5. For many, the end of winter marks the return of baseball, often fondly called America's Favorite Pastime. Do you think the phrase still accurately suits the sport today? If so, defend your case; if not, pen an argument for what you think could more accurately be called America's Favorite Pastime in 2022.

PROFESSIONAL

1. Hear the collective groan of new freelancers everywhere? That's right – it's tax season. Take deep breaths, stay hydrated, and don't wait until the last minute (even if you pay quarterly). This year, pay careful attention to what information you don't have readily available. What has you frantically paging through your emails or credit card statements? Where can you keep better records for 2022? Making note of these trouble spots now will help prevent future struggles. Consider recording what you did in order this season to serve as a step-by-step instruction manual to soften the learning curve for next time.

2. After you file, take a small moment to celebrate – and then create templates for your 2022 finances based on the documents you used for your 2021 filing. Taking the time now will prevent the last-minute scramble next year.

3. The post-tax season is the perfect time to straighten out your hard drive. Comb through your documents and organize them. Create a naming convention for your drafts and files if you don't have one yet. Clean up that chaotic desktop. Empty your trash can. And for heaven's sake, name all those untitled folders already.

4. Your digital spaces are in order. Now it's time to turn your attention to your physical ones. Wait until the first sunny day where it's warm enough to open all the windows and then clean your favorite writing and reading spaces while enjoying the fresh spring air. Fill your lungs with the crisp breeze of a new season and free yourself from all the clutter you've accumulated over the long, dark winter. (We know you've done a lot of organization already this season, but trust us and do your decluttering in spring – this isn't a task you'll want to do in the dead of winter or the wilting heat of July.)

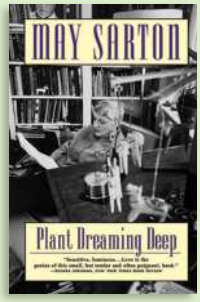
5. Spring marks the start of writing conference season – have you filled your calendar with events yet? Many of the gatherings this season will probably be hybrid or virtual events, so don't sweat it too much if you haven't started researching them until now. Start with events near you and in your state, then branch out to specific nationwide events with an emphasis in your genre. Check your local universities for festivals or readings, too.

SEASONAL READS

Spring Snow
by Yukio Mishima

Plant Dreaming Deep
by May Sarton

The Great Spring: Writing, Zen, and This Zigzag Life
by Natalie Goldberg



"You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming."

—PABLO NERUDA

JUMP-STARTS

1. This is the time of year when bees emerge from their hives, eager to find pollen and replenish depleted rations. If you were to imagine a colony of humans inspired by a beehive, what would it look like? Who would live there? What would be at stake for these characters? What would threaten its existence?

2. A protagonist witnesses their neighbor growing – or burying – something highly unusual in their garden. What is it? And, more importantly, what is your character going to do about it?

3. Alternatively, imagine your protagonist has become determined to plant something seemingly impossible to grow. What obstacles stand in their way, and do they ultimately succeed in their goal?

4. Graduation ceremonies are rife with pomp, circumstance, and plenty of high-stakes emotion. Imagine an argument that takes place at one such ceremony. What sparks the conflict? What does each party want? How will it be resolved? (For extra credit, write the same argument scene from another character's viewpoint after you've finished.)

5. Spring is a season of new beginnings. Take a character from a story you've been working on and imagine they're offered a fresh start from whatever's been holding them back – but it comes at a cost. Would they accept the offer? How can you best render their internal conflict on the page for the reader?

Summer

"Summer has a flavor like no other. Always fresh and simmered in sunshine."

—OPRAH WINFREY

PERSONAL

1. Are you the type to make "Summer Bucket Lists," highlighting all the things you hope to achieve and experience this summer? Consider making one especially for your creative life. Do you want to take more pictures, cook more (or cook less), practice freewriting each day, go on a retreat, spend more time in nature? How can your creativity best flourish in this warmest and brightest season? What does it need to thrive?

2. Make a list of 13 sensory details – smells, sounds, etc. – you associated with your childhood summers; compare them to details you experience in the summers you enjoy today. What has remained constant? What has changed? What do you miss, and what newfound sensations do you treasure?

3. Many summers can be defined by the one song that seems to be on constant repeat; more recent examples include 2021's "good 4 u" by Olivia Rodrigo or 2012's "Call Me Maybe" by Carly Rae Jepsen, while TLC's "Waterfalls" dominated *Billboard* charts in 1995, just as Survivor's "Eye of the Tiger" did in 1982. Make a playlist of the top-charting songs of the summer during a critical period in your life. Where do you remember hearing these songs most often? What memories do they evoke?

4. Let's play a summer edition of "I remember." Grab a pen and start a

blank piece of paper with the sentence "I remember one summer..." and see what comes to mind. If you need more specificity, try "I remember one summer vacation..." or "I'll never forget one particular summer because..."

5. Write about your most memorable summer romance. But don't limit yourself to notions of traditional "love:" Your most memorable summer fling may not have been with a person at all but rather with a comic book series, a sport, a writing genre, etc. Be creative in your definition of "romance" and write about the strongest infatuation that comes to mind.

PROFESSIONAL

1. If ever there was a perfect time to catch up on your TBR pile, it's summer. Take stock of the books that have come out recently in your genre. (Even if you're unpublished as of yet, it's still important to keep stock of recent publishing successes in your field – you'll need to be familiar with this landscape when it's time to query.) Make a reading list in order of priority at the beginning of the summer and chip away at these titles all season long at the pool, in your sunny hammock, or out on the balcony with an iced coffee.

2. One of the best things a writer can do for other authors? Leave reviews! Even the briefest of reviews posted on Amazon, Goodreads, or other sites can do a world of good for your fellow wordsmiths. It's easy to fire off a few starred reviews from your lounge chair, making this a great work-from-backyard activity.

3. 'Tis the season to take a writing retreat, whether it's organized by others or a do-it-yourself affair. Make a mood board of what your ideal writing-fueled weekend would look like. Are you in the woods, by the water, in a metropolitan hotel? Are your meals provided, or does cooking spark your creativity? How can you create the optimal conditions for a burst of writing productivity? When you know what you need, mark your calendar and make it happen.

4. If an organized start-of-summer writing sprint sounds more up your alley, consider participating in Jami Attenberg's popular #1000wordsofsummer series, where participants write 1,000 words each day for two weeks. Stay in the know at 1000wordsofsummer.substack.com (and subscribe to Attenberg's excellent Craft Talk newsletter while you're there).

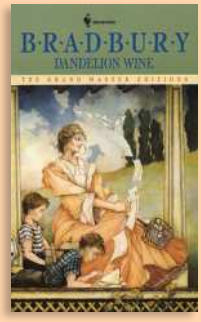
5. While the rest of the Northern Hemisphere has beaches and barbecues on the brain, savvy freelancers know it's time to start dreaming of snowballs and sugarplums – at least for outlets with long lead times. Start honing your holiday pitches now in the hopes of landing a festive byline – and paycheck – come the end of the year.

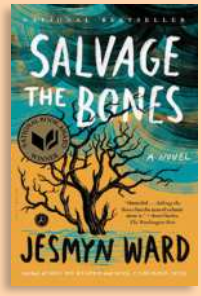
SEASONAL READS

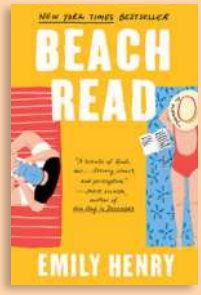
Dandelion Wine
by Ray Bradbury

Salvage the Bones
by Jesmyn Ward

Beach Read
by Emily Henry







JUMP-STARTS

1. Take inspiration from "The Year Without a Summer" of 1816, when (due to a massive volcanic eruption at Indonesia's Mount Tambora) the Northern Hemisphere experienced highly unusual cold temperatures that ultimately led to an agricultural crisis. Either write from the perspective of someone in 1816 experiencing the strange phenomenon or imagine a "year without a summer" set in the near future. How does the weather impact your

"In summer, the song sings itself."

—WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

world's inhabitants? How do they cope and change as a result?

2. Your character has been planning an epic summer road trip for months – only to have it go horribly, terribly awry at the last minute. What's gone wrong? How does this impact your character? What will they do about it?

3. There's a reason why so many romance books have other people's weddings at their core: Weddings are rife with drama, expectations, high stakes, and an abundance of strong emotions. Your character is about to attend a summer wedding they aren't looking forward to. What does this event mean for your character? Why are they experiencing dread? How do you think the eventual wedding will (or won't) change your protagonist and their expectations?

4. Summer jobs offer many teens and young adults their first taste of employment. Write about a conflict that occurs at a character's first summer job. What's at stake for your protagonist? How will the dispute ultimately be resolved, and how will your character change as a result?

5. Choose one of the following summertime settings and let a story grow from there, taking care to capture the time and place fully and richly on the page:

- **a.** A beach at high noon
- **b.** An amusement park in the future
- **c.** An ice-cream parlor just before closing
- **d.** A struggling modern drive-in movie theater
- **e.** A swimming pool in the 1960s
- **f.** A kitchen sometime before the year 1915

Fall

"Of all the seasons, autumn offers the most to man and requires the least of him."

—HAL BORLAND

PERSONAL

1. What was the back-to-school season like for you as a child? Was it a source of dread or anticipation? What emotions did you feel during this time? How would you describe this time of year to someone who goes to school year-round? Do you feel any echoes of the back-to-school season in your adult life?

2. Autumn is a season of dramatic change: While spring seems like a slow, creeping battle with winter, it can often feel like summer changes drastically to fall overnight. Take the time now to reflect on the changes you've undergone this year. Which have been positive or negative? How have you shifted or transformed this year? Any of these changes – internal or external – can be fertile fields for essay ideas.

3. It's harvest season, when we retire our gardens and preserve their riches as best we can for winter. Imagine the fall is your own creative harvest season. What can you do now to prepare for winter? What stores did you find depleted last winter? What habits, systems, or mindsets can you build now and reap rewards from later?

4. Write about your most memorable costume – Halloween or otherwise. Where did it come from? How was it chosen? How did you feel when you wore it?

5. For many of us, fall marks a return to our kitchens, filling our homes with smells of apples, pumpkins, and warm spices. What flavors

signify fall to you (versus the flavors of spring, summer, and winter)? What foods do you eat to mark the turning of each season? What strong memories do you have attached to each period of the year? If you were to assign a signature dish to each season, what would it be?

PROFESSIONAL

1. Look back at the professional goals you set for yourself at the beginning of the year. There's still a full quarter of a year left to achieve them if any still feel untouched or unresolved. It's also a good time to pare them down with zero self-judgment. With only a few months left in the year, what do you feel is *most* important for you to accomplish, and what can be rolled over to next year?

2. Autumn is a busy, busy season for publishing, with authors seemingly releasing books left and right. Take note of their launch strategies: What are you seeing authors do most? What seems to be working? What outside-the-box promotional strategies caught your eye?

3. Many of us prefer a free-flowing creative summer, but autumn is a perfect time to reintroduce structure to our writing habits before the dark of winter sets in again. Try a daily morning exercise, sign up for a writing class, or research writing groups in your area. If you're planning to participate in National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), you might like to spend September and October researching and outlining so you'll hit the page running on Nov. 1.

4. As people return to their desks, they're increasingly online – and on social media. Take a look at your own social presence. Could you be posting more to promote your work, or do you think you should take a step back from social media to write more? Which platforms have you grown in the last year, and which have stagnated? Which spaces seem to provide more return for your investments?

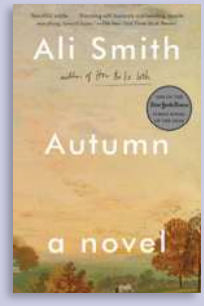
5. Like it or not, much of the publishing world shuts down between Dec. 24 and Jan. 2 – which also means the pre-holiday season is a chaotic, deadline-filled period. Take the time at the end of fall to get any editorial ducks in a row before the holiday seasons descend. Can you get a jump on any of your deadlines? Send any admin-related emails before the crunch time? Deploy any invoices before the holiday rush begins?

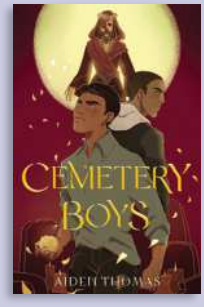
SEASONAL READS

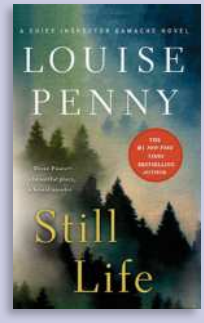
Autumn
by Ali Smith

Cemetery Boys
by Aiden Thomas

Still Life
by Louise Penny







JUMP-STARTS

1. Write a story that begins with the following sentence: "It was already shaping up to be the worst first day of school ever."

2. In honor of the impending spooky season, write a story with a member of the undead as your protagonist – a ghost, a zombie, a vampire, etc. Give us a glimpse of their daily, ordinary routine before something happens that will change them forever.

3. Inspired by Daylight Saving Time, write about a world in which time suddenly starts moving differently. Who first notices it? Does time move the same way for everyone, or is it only different for one person or a few individuals? What are the consequences of this new shift?

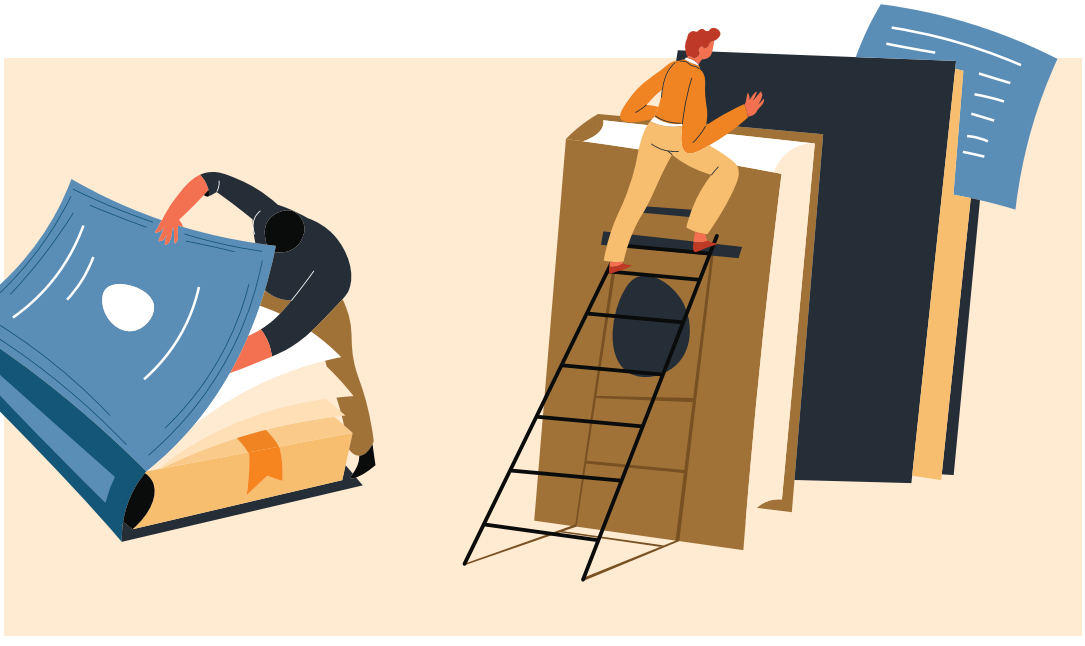
4. With much of the natural world awash in reds, oranges, and golds, it's time to practice your descriptive writing skills. Write a short piece of description that strongly features an autumnal tree of your choosing. Your prose should not only describe the tree using plenty of sensory details but should also evoke an overall mood. The reader should have some small idea of this story's genre, time period, location, and the overarching mood or emotion that will permeate the narrative based solely on this one piece of description.

5. There's a reason why so many mysteries are set during the cozy season of fall. Take a stab at writing your own autumnal story featuring an element of mystery. How will your protagonist solve the mystery? What do they need to solve it? What's at stake if the mystery doesn't get solved?

Postscript

PUBLISHING RESOURCES

When it comes to getting published, there are many spinning cogs. Here are some of the resources you'll need to take your work from inside your brain to in front of the eyes of readers. The following listings are a sampling of what the industry has to offer. For a complete guide, visit writermag.com. →



THE MONTH AHEAD

March 1

It's National Women's History Month; why not put in an order of books by women writers at a feminist bookshop, such as Café con Libros in Brooklyn? cafeconlibrosbooks.indielite.org

March 3

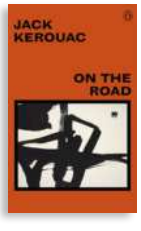
It's the 25th annual World Book Day. Hug a book to celebrate – or donate some to young readers in need at booksforkids.org or firstbook.org.

March 8

The longlist for the 2022 Women's Prize for Fiction is announced. It's also National Proofreading Day, so send a (properly spelled) thank you note to your favorite grammarian.

March 12

Jack Kerouac, best known for his novel *On the Road*, was born 100 years ago on this day.



SOFIAV/SHUTTERSTOCK

Agents

Information in this section is provided to *The Writer* by the individual markets and events; for more information, contact those entities directly.

F = Fiction N = Nonfiction P = Poetry C = Children's Y = Young adult O = Other $ = Offers payment

C Y ADAMS LITERARY
Represents children's and YA authors and artists with picture books, middle grade, and YA fiction. Submit via online submission form only.
Contact: Adams Literary, 7845 Colony Road, C4 #215, Charlotte, NC 28226.
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info@adamsliterary.com
adamsliterary.com

F N Y ANDY ROSS AGENCY
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Contact: Andy Ross Agency, 767 Santa Ray Ave., Oakland, CA 94610.
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andyrossagency.com

F N BETSY AMSTER LITERARY ENTERPRISES
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b.amster.assistant@gmail.com
amsterlit.com

F N B.J. ROBBINS LITERARY AGENCY
Literary and commercial fiction and general nonfiction, with a particular interest in memoir, biography, history, pop culture, sports, travel, African-American, science, and health.
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bjrobbinsliterary.com

F N Y COOKE MCDERMID LITERARY MANAGEMENT
Represents literary fiction, commercial fiction (thrillers, horror, and upmarket women's fiction), research- and narrative-driven nonfiction, and middle grade and YA books. Email query only. No attachments.
Contact: The Cooke Agency.
(647) 788-4010.
admin@cookemcdermid.com
cookemcdermid.com

F N DON CONGDON ASSOCIATES
Represents authors of fiction and nonfiction. Check website for individual agents' interests.
Contact: Don Congdon Associates, 110 William St., Suite. 2202, New York, NY 10038.
212-645-1229.
dca@doncongdon.com
doncongdon.com

F N DOUG GRAD LITERARY AGENCY
Represents fiction and narrative nonfiction. Query via email before submitting.
Contact: Doug Grad Literary Agency.
718-788-6067.
query@dgliterary.com
dgliterary.com

F N EMILIE STEWART LITERARY AGENCY
Specializes in literary and commercial fiction and nonfiction. Query by email only.
Contact: Emilie Stewart Literary Agency.
646-559-2702.
info@emiliestewartagency.com
emiliestewartagency.com

F N Y THE FRIEDRICH AGENCY
Representing writers in the categories of literary and commercial fiction for adults and young adults, as well as narrative nonfiction and memoir. Submit via email only. No attachments.
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lcarson@friedrichagency.com,
hbrattesani@friedrichagency.com,
hcarr@friedrichagency.com
friedrichagency.com

F N C Y HG LITERARY
Represents authors of fiction, nonfiction, and all levels of children's and YA literature. No romance, science fiction, religious fiction, or screenplays. Check website for agents' interests. Email submissions only.
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Emails for agents on website.
hsgagency.com

Classifieds

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Get out of the cold and into the hottest event for writers!
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Plus participate in Advanced Submission Read and Critique programs and workshops of your work!
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31st
• Meet & Pitch Literary Agents, Editors, & Publishers
• Attend IN-PERSON or VIRTUALLY from home or office
• More than 40 Industry Pros and Best-selling Authors reveal the latest on Traditional & Indie Publishing
.... and much more!
For Aspiring, Active, and Accomplished Authors and Screenwriters
March 4-6, 2022
Hilton Los Angeles Westside
Culver City, CA
www.wcwriters.com/ccwc

CONTESTS

Call for entries: 2022 Nelligan Prize for Short Fiction. $2,500 awarded to author of winning story, plus publication in Fall 2022 issue of *Colorado Review*. Deadline is March 14, 2022. $15 entry fee. Send SASE or visit website for complete guidelines. Nelligan Prize, Colorado Review, 9105 Campus Delivery, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-9105.
https://nelliganprize.colostate.edu

EDITING/CRITIQUING

Unlock the potential of your manuscript!
Want to write a good book? I can help.
with pen and paper
story | concept | voice
Helga Schier, PhD.
Publishing executive, published author and experienced editor offers powerful, comprehensive and effective editorial services.
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– Ed Driscoll, award-winning comedian and writer
withpenandpaper.com 310.828.8421
helga@withpenandpaper.com

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PROFESSIONAL EDITOR, Award-winning Author (Bantam, Berkley/Ace, others) offers extensive critiques, respectful in-depth editing. Fiction, non-fiction, juvenile/YA. Carol Gaskin 941-377-7640. Email: Carol@EditorialAlchemy.com or website: www.EditorialAlchemy.com

RETREATS

GET AWAY TO WRITE - FLORIDA. March 8-13, 2022. Escape the cold to write in Florida. Spend an inspiring week working on your memoir with Peter E. Murphy or poetry with Emari DiGiorgio. Enjoy plentiful writing time, insightful feedback, homemade meals and time to relax. Learn more and register: www.stockton.edu/murphywriting

WRITING RESOURCES

It's possible to learn to be funnier.
Visit www.ThinkingFunny.com humor-writing resources, workshops, free contests. getinfo@thinkingfunny.com

The Writer

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE

For bonus articles, contest alerts, writing prompts, & industry news, subscribe to our free newsletter!

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hornfischerlit.com

F N Y IGLA
Commercial and literary fiction, topical nonfiction, and middle grade and YA fiction. No screenplays or children's picture books. See website for agents' interests and email addresses. Email queries only.
Contact: Irene Goodman Literary Agency, 27 West 24th St., Suite 804, New York, NY 10010.
Email via website.
irenegoodman.com

F N Y JANE ROTROSEN AGENCY
Seeks commercial fiction and YA. Also considers memoirs and narrative and prescriptive nonfiction. Submit via email; no attachments.
Contact: Jane Rotrosen Agency, Attn: Submissions, 318 East 51st St., New York, NY 10022. 212-593-4330.
info@janerotrosen.com
janerotrosen.com

F N MCCORMICK LITERARY
Represents authors of literary and commercial fiction and nonfiction, including memoir, history, narrative, biography, lifestyle, sports, self-help, and pop culture.
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queries@mccormicklit.com
mccormickwilliams.com

F N C PHILIP G. SPITZER LITERARY AGENCY
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kim.lombardini@spitzeragency.com
spitzeragency.com

F N Y SARAH JANE FREYMANN LITERARY AGENCY
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sarahjanefreymann.com

F N TALBOT FORTUNE AGENCY
Represents authors of romance, women's fiction, thrillers, mysteries, literary fiction, and narrative nonfiction, including history, immersive journalism, and current events. No children's books, Westerns, science fiction, fantasy, poetry, or screenplays. Submit queries by email with the first five pages of manuscript. No attachments.
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talbotfortuneagency.com

C WENDY SCHMALZ AGENCY
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schmalzagency.com

C Y WERNICK & PRATT AGENCY
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F N WILLIAM CLARK ASSOCIATES
Represents authors of literary fiction, narrative nonfiction, and translations. Submit queries using online submission form. No screenplays.
Contact: William Clark Associates, 54 West 21st St., Suite 809, New York, New York 10010.
212-675-2784.
Email from website.
wmclark.com

F N C Y WRITERS HOUSE
Literary and commercial fiction, women's fiction, sci-fi/fantasy, narrative nonfiction, history, memoir, biography, psychology, science, parenting, cookbooks, how-to, self-help, business, finance, YA, and picture books.
Contact: Writers House, 120 Broadway, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10271.
212-685-2400.
See website for agents' emails.
writershouse.com

Contests

O **AURAND HARRIS MEMORIAL PLAYWRITING AWARD**
Seeks new, unpublished, and unproduced full-length plays for young audiences. Open to all playwrights. Only submit one manuscript per year. Submit by email only.
Deadline: May 1.
Prizes: First place $1,000, second $500.
Contact: The New England Theatre Conference, Inc., Aurand Harris Playwriting Award.
harris-award@netconline.org
netconline.org

F **BRISTOL SHORT STORY PRIZE**
International short story competition open to all writers over the age of 16. Maximum 4,000 words. Stories can be on any theme or subject and are welcome in any style, including graphic, verse, or genre-based. Enter via online form or regular mail.
Deadline: April 30.
Entry Fee: £9 per story.
Prizes: First place: £1,000; Second place: £500; Third place: £250. 17 shortlisted writers will receive £100. All winners will be published in the anthology and will receive two paperback copies.
Contact: Bristol Short Story Prize, Unit 5.16, Paintworks, Bath Road, Bristol BS4 3EH, UK.
enquiries@bristolprize.co.uk
bristolprize.co.uk

F C Y **CHANTICLEER BOOK REVIEWS AWARDS**
Fifteen genre writing competitions for books featuring contemporary stories, romance, middle grade, historical, paranormal, fantasy, and other themes. Books may be published, unpublished, indie, or traditional.
Deadline: Varies depending on award.
Entry Fee: $99 for most entries.
Prizes: First-place winners receive a prize package and marketing package, 15 grand prize genre winners recognized, one overall grand prize winner receives $1,000. Grand prize winners announced at Chanticleer Awards Gala.
Contact: Chanticleer Book Reviews, 1050 Larrabee Ave., Suite 104 #334, Bellingham, WA, 98225.
chanticleer@chantireviews.com
chantireviews.com

F N **IMPRESS PRIZE FOR NEW WRITERS**
Looking to discover and publish new writing talent. Entries are assessed by the Impress team and produce a shortlist from which a panel chooses the winner. The panel is comprised of representatives from the publishing industry and the writing community.
Deadline: Aug. 31.
Entry fee: £25.
Prizes: Winner gets a publishing contract and book published in paperback and eBook forms. Runners-up also considered for publishing potential.
Contact: Impress Books Limited.
prize@impress-books.co.uk
impress-books.co.uk/impress-prize

F **JAMES JONES FIRST NOVEL FELLOWSHIP**
Awarded annually to an American author of a first novel-in-progress. Submit via online submission form. Submit a two-page (maximum) outline and the first 50 pages.
Deadline: March 15.
Entry Fee: $30 hardcopy; $33 online.
Prizes: $10,000 first place, $1,000 for runner-up.
Contact: James Jones First Novel Fellowship, c/o MA/MFA in Creative Writing, Wilkes University, 84 W. South St., Wilkes-Barre, PA 18766.
jamesjonesfirstnovel@wilkes.edu
wilkes.edu

F **SATURDAY EVENING POST GREAT AMERICAN FICTION CONTEST**
In its nearly two centuries of existence, *The Saturday Evening Post* has published short fiction by a who's who of American authors – ultimately helping to define what it means to be an American. Submit any genre of fiction between 1,500 and 5,000 words. All stories must be previously unpublished. Electronic submissions only.
Deadline: July 1.
Entry Fee: $10.
Prizes: Winning story will be published in the January/February 2023 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post*, and the author will receive $1,000. Five runners-up will each receive $200 and will also have their stories published online.
Contact: Editorial, The Saturday Evening Post, 3520 Guion Rd., Indianapolis, IN 46222.
317-634-1100.
editors@saturdayeveningpost.com
saturdayeveningpost.com/fiction-contest

F N **TOM HOWARD/JOHN H. REID FICTION & ESSAY CONTEST**
Enter any original short story, essay, or other work of prose up to 6,000 words. Submit through website.
Deadline: April 30.
Entry Fee: $20 per entry.
Prizes: $3,000 award in each category. Ten honorable mentions (any category) will receive gift certificates from Duotrope. All winners published online.
Contact: Winning Writers, 351 Pleasant St., PMB 222, Northampton, MA 01060. Adam Cohen, President.
adam@winningwriters.com
winningwriters.com

THE MONTH AHEAD

March 14
It's National Write Down Your Story Day! Use #WriteYourStoryDay to share your work with others on social media.

March 17
Want a St. Patrick's-themed writing prompt? Describe a day in the life of a regular, ordinary, run-of-the-mill leprechaun.

March 23-26
It's time for #AWP22, aka the Association of Writers & Writing Programs' massive annual conference. Several events will be live-streamed or pre-recorded if you can't make it to the in-person event in Philadelphia. awpwriter.org/awp_conference

GOURAUD STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK; SOFAV/SHUTTERSTOCK

QUICK QUERYING TIPS

1. Querying is often a long, long road for many writers. It's an exciting time, but it can also be an exhausting one. It's important to manage your expectations before diving in: This process will probably not be quick or easy, but what professional journey is?

2. To avoid burnout – and to better tailor your query to its recipient – it's a good idea not to fire off as many queries as humanly possible in one weekend. Feel free to work in batches, but embrace strategic, small-batch sessions instead of massive ones. Going slowly will also help you avoid making messy mistakes, too.

3. It's OK to stop and regroup at any point. If you've garnered many rejections, it may be worth asking a professional to take a look at your sample pages, proposal, or query letter. It's hard to see where we're being vague or unclear when we're so close to our manuscripts – a third party can help you identify any potential missteps along the road.

4. Querying can sometimes feel like a race to get published. But if your material isn't particularly time-sensitive, don't give in to self-imposed pressure, especially when you see other authors' book deals popping up on your social media feeds. Your manuscript does not have an expiration date. Neither does your career. Throw out the yardstick you're using to compare yourself to others – remember, you have no idea how long they spent on the querying road, either.

Publishers

F N P C FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX
Publishes a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction, plus poetry and children's books. Unsolicited material accepted via regular mail only.
Contact: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.
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fsgbooks.com

N O HARVARD COMMON PRESS
Specializes in cookbooks and parenting/childcare books. Submit proposals by regular mail or email. Check website for genre email addresses.
Contact: The Harvard Common Press, Attn: Submissions, 100 Cummings Center, Suite 265D, Beverly, MA 01915.
978-282-9590.
quartoknows.com/Harvard-Common-Press

F N KENSINGTON PUBLISHING CORP
Publishes a wide variety of genre fiction and nonfiction under various imprints. No children's, YA, poetry, science fiction, or fantasy. Check website for specific editor interests and email addresses. Submit query only (no manuscripts) by email. Check website for genre email addresses.
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N KENT STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Publishes in the following areas: Ohio and the surrounding region, sports, history (Civil War, abolitionism, military, true crime), and literary studies (Hemingway, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Inklings).
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330-672-7913.
swadswo2@kent.edu
kentstateuniversitypress.com

N LLEWELLYN
Publishes practical nonfiction books with an emphasis on body, mind, and spirit, including magic, wicca, paganism, witchcraft, ghost hunting, spirit guides, tarot card decks, tarot books, reincarnation, astrology, alternative health, angels, and more.
Contact: Llewellyn Worldwide, Acquisitions Department, 2143 Wooddale Dr., Woodbury, MN 55125.
651-291-1970.
submissions@llewellyn.com
llewellyn.com

N NEW WORLD LIBRARY
Focused on nonfiction books about spirituality, personal growth, women's interest, religion, sustainable business, the human-animal relationship, Native American interest, and the environment. No children's books submissions. Prefers email submissions.
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415-884-2100.
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N C SASQUATCH BOOKS
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206-467-4300.
sasquatchbooks.com

N SQUARE ONE PUBLISHERS
Adult nonfiction books on alternative health, collectibles, cooking, gambling, health, how to, parenting, personal finance, postcards, self-help, and writing. Submit via regular mail only.
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squareonepublishers.com

Self-Publishers

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Offers quick publishing turnaround time: 48 hours for production of perfect-bound books, five days for hardcover and coil-bound books. Includes free book templates.
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info@48hrbooks.com
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Publisher of children's books, adult, YA, poetry, memoirs, devotionals, cookbooks, and more. Offers text formatting and cover design. Books are also formatted for Amazon Kindle.
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submissions@stonesong.com
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Magazines

PERFORMING ARTS

N $ AMERICAN THEATRE
Covers trends and events in all types of theater, as well as economic and legislative developments affecting the arts, with a particular focus on professional, not-for-profit theater. Mail or email query.
Contact: Rob Weinert-Kendt, Editor-in-Chief, American Theatre, 520 8th Ave., 24th Floor, New York, NY 10018.
212-609-5900 ext. 370.
rwkendt@tcg.org
americantheatre.org

N O $ DRAMATICS
Monthly magazine for high school theater students and teachers with practical articles about acting, directing, design, production, and career-oriented profiles of working theater professionals. Also publishes one-act and full-length plays. Plays should be performable in high schools.
Contact: Dramatics Magazine. Submit ideas through form on website.
dramatics.org

N $ EMMY
Bimonthly television industry magazine for TV professionals and enthusiasts. Official publication of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. No highly technical articles or academic/fan-magazine type articles. Best section for newcomers is "Labors of Love," the 500-word, front-of-the-book profiles of TV people.
Contact: Editor, Emmy, 5220 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood, CA 91601.
emmys.com/emmymag

N $ OPERA NEWS
Publishes articles of interest for the opera professional and the opera buff. No fiction, poetry, or personal remembrances. Submit query or manuscript and published writing samples via email.
Contact: Kitty March, Opera News, 70 Lincoln Center Plaza, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10023.
info@operanews.com
operanews.com

SOCIAL JUSTICE/EQUALITY

N $ BRIARPATCH
Publishes on a wide range of topics: current events, grassroots activism, electoral politics, economic justice, ecology, labor, food security, gender equality, indigenous struggles, international solidarity, and other issues of political importance. See website for editorial schedule deadlines and guidelines. Submit query by email.
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briarpatchmagazine.com

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Publishes articles that fit the magazine's mission of advancing democracy and economic justice, promoting social movements, and discussing politics and culture. Submit query using online form. See website for department guidelines.
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inthesetimes.com

F N $ LEARNING FOR JUSTICE
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learningforjustice.org

N P $ THE PROGRESSIVE
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Gigi *Will Know*

There are a lot of things that have to happen in order for your book to get any pre-orders.

Dear Gigi,
The last book in my series will go live soon, so for the past few weeks, I've promoted it at $.99 for pre-order with fabulous graphics in my newsletter, on Facebook and Twitter, on my large writers' group, and in my personal email group…but with disappointing results. The information has gone out to hundreds, perhaps over a thousand, but I only have eight pre-orders. In your opinion, are launches and pre-orders worth the time, effort, and expense?
—BAFFLED BONNIE

Dear Bonnie,

Hey, remember that thing people used to say about party planning? Invite all you want, but only assume 30% of the folks will say yes? That's what I was thinking about when I read your details, so in general, I think you're probably in about the right place. The sales funnel is never very turnkey: folks have to see the Facebook post on their feed or check the page, or they have to see your tweet as it goes zipping by like one of my deadlines. For your newsletter, your recipients have to see it in their mailboxes first – and it might even end up in that "Promotions" file that Gmail has set up for everyone now. Then the folks who get your newsletter have to be in a mood to open it, click the link, and pre-order your book. (Clicking that link to spend money is pretty hard, too. That's not a judgment on you or your work, it's just a fact.)

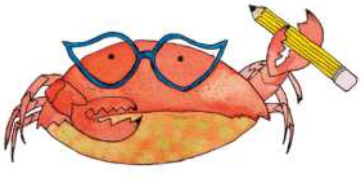
There are a lot of things that have to happen in order for your book to get any pre-orders. But you specifically addressed numbers, so I asked another expert, just to cover our bases.

Jane Friedman, an absolute goldmine of information in the self-publishing book world, said, "You can calculate an expected number of pre-orders based on earlier sales figures as well as the size of a writer's platform (primarily the number of newsletter subscribers in this case)." What she's saying is that the only numbers you can *really* depend on here are the people who are signed up to your actual newsletter. These folks, she said, are likely the ones who are "waiting for the next book – period. That's why the best success should come from an author's newsletter subscribers, who are presumably *the* interested ones here. The newsletter needs to mention the pre-order and/or launch a few times at least." (I assume you did this, rather than depending on a one-off note.)

She went on to note that Facebook and Twitter aren't likely to have much effect, with one other caveat: If you really sense that you should have more pre-orders (social media *has* been known to sell a few copies here and there, after all), then you should take a hard look at your graphics. You mentioned you're happy with them, but Friedman suggested that you engage in some A/B split testing, and I agree with her. (That's where you test out one graphic or creative treatment with one part of your mailing list and another style with the other part of your list.) This can be a really valuable way to see what's working and what isn't with your readership.

I like the whole launch and pre-order exercise, by the way. It gives us a good ego boost to see folks liking our posts – and even if it doesn't result in sales, writers get good practice talking about their work. Win-win.

Promote on,
—Gigi



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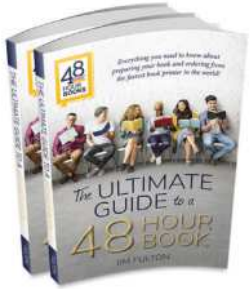

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